

赤松中学（あかまつ・ちゅうがく）

生年月日、年齢、出身地、現住所に至るまで全てが不明の覆面作家。  
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本作・武装学園小説『緋弾のアリア』は、同作家の2シリーズ目となる。

Illustration

◎こぶいち

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小説では『これはゾンビですか?』(富士見書房)の  
挿絵を担当。

趣味はゲーム、読書。

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# 緋弾のアリア IV

Aria the Scarlet Ammo

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## 緋弾のアリアIV 墮ちた緋弾

東京武偵高校、そこは武力を行使する探偵——通称『武偵』を育成する特殊な学校。強襲科の超エリートでSランクの最強武偵・アリアのパートナーに選ばれてしまった（普段は）ただの一般人・遠山キンジは、夏休みを利用して足りない単位を補うことにして。キンジが目を付けたのは、カジノの警備というちっぽけな任務——のはずだったのだが……。『砂漠の魔女』バトラの呪彈に倒れたアリアの死まで24時間。そしてキンジの前に立ちはだかる『不可視の銃弾』の使い手、カナ。アリアを消そうとするカナの真の目的とは!? 大スケールアクション＆ラブコメディー第4弾!!

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アストロノート! [イラスト: bomi]

アストロノート!2 [イラスト: bomi]

アストロノート!3 [イラスト: bomi]

緋弾のアリア [イラスト: こぶいち]

緋弾のアリアII 燐える銀氷

[イラスト: こぶいち]

緋弾のアリアIII 緋色の真

[イラスト: こぶいち]

緋弾のアリアIV 墮ちた緋弾

[イラスト: こぶいち]

# 緋弾のアリア

Aria the Scarlet Ammo

墮ちた緋弾

スカラレット

赤松中学





# Kanzaki H·Aria

アサルト  
強襲科 神崎・H・アリア

名探偵の遺伝子を受け継ぐ、  
Sランクの凄腕武偵。母親を救うため、  
犯罪組織「イー・ウー」と戦っている。

インケスタ  
探偵科 とおやま  
遠山キンジ

しぶしぶアリアのパートナーをつとめる  
Eランク武僧。ある特殊体質のせいで、  
異性が苦手。

Kinji  
Tohyama





「お前たちは未熟すぎる。  
パトラ<sup>如き</sup>に不覚を取るようでは、  
『第一の可能性』は無い」



P11  
1弾 不可視の銃弾  
イン・ヴィジ・ビ・レ

P23  
2弾 緊急任務  
クエスト・ブースト

P82  
3弾 夏祭り

P133  
4弾 同士討ち  
フォーリング・アウト

P211  
5弾 砂金の楼閣  
アブ・シン・ベル

P256  
最終弾  
緋弾の覚醒

P281  
エピローグ  
Go For The NEXT!!!



Contents



## 1st Ammo: Invisible Bullet

---

"Kinji... Let's kill Aria together,"

Kana clearly said.

Kill Aria?

"What... are you talking about Nii-san!?"

My forehead broke into a cold sweat.

The dusk sky gradually shifted into deep night sky with each passing second.

The wind blew through the uninhabited man-made island where we are right now. Hearing my question, Nii-san...

"???"

...perching himself on one of the wind generator's propellers, he just slightly inclined his head.

...Oh, that's right.

Whenever Nii-san cross-dresses as Kana, he loses recognition of himself as 'Nii-san'.

"Kana, wait for me. I'll be right there."

Thus I changed my way of referring to him. As if I was ascending a steep hill, I clambered over the crooked wing of the plane wreckage that I caused from the result of the emergency landing back in the hijacking incident in April.

Kill... Aria?

I tried to convince myself that it must have been some kind of a joke...or that I must have misheard it.

Kana... Nii-san is always right. More than anyone else in this world.

He fights for the sake of the powerless, defending them. He never asks for a monetary reward from the poor upon helping them.

No matter how strong his adversaries are, he always faces them without fear despite awareness of their danger.

With that said, why would those words come out of Nii-san's mouth?

"You abandoned your little brother for half a year...and when you finally show up, the first word you say to him is 'Kill Aria?' Lay off the joke Kana, this is not funny."

I approached Kana, stopping at the farthest point that the wing can take me.

The distance from here to the propeller where Kana is sitting is about 2 meters.

It's in leaping distance. But the difference in height is significant. It would be the end for me if I slip and fall towards the ground. This is an artificial island so the ground is fortified with concrete.

"It wasn't a joke. I will take Aria's life tonight."

Kana spoke in her beautiful voice filled with hardened resolve.

"Aria H. Kanzaki. That girl...is a seed of evil. It is the ally of justice, in other words, Tohyama lineage's calling to vanquish evil."

That line sent a chill down my spine.

Justice.

There has been no precedent where Kana had failed in carrying out her mission after saying that word.

--This is bad---

Kana, right after reappearing from her sudden disappearance, for I don't know what reason, is really serious about killing Aria.

I can't really fathom her real intention. My mind is confused at what was happening that I couldn't reason things properly.

However, one thing that is certain is that if I don't stop her now, Aria will surely die!

Being impelled by that apprehension, and after taking a glance at the ground 15 meters below, I closed my eyes and flashed in my mind the

scene of Aria a while ago, delighted by the propitious news of the prospective release of her mother.

And then...

"Kana!"

I leaped towards the propeller, where Kana is sitting.

Leaping towards the propeller, with the same width of a bench, is an effortless task but...

The propeller tipped to one side from the weight of two people.

"Ugh...!"

The sudden sway made me shudder, but I immediately crouched down, adjusting my center of gravity while fixing my balance.

On the other hand, Kana did not appear to be unnerved one bit.

"Exodus 32:27---'Each of you put your sword on your side, and go to and from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.'---Follow me, Kinji."

Kana, after reciting a verse from the Bible, stood up. The Tokyo city's illumination in her background.

"Aria is still young. We can easily kill her while she doesn't have a partner."

"Hold on a bit, Kana!"

I shouted. My voice quivering from the mixture of rage and astonishment.

"You...disappeared for half a year...and then suddenly tell me these things! Do you have any idea how I felt!? Up until now I thought you were dead! And then you show up yourself out of a sudden and then telling me things like 'Let's kill Aria'! What the hell is going on!?"

Ahh... I never thought that I would yell at Kana.

I myself can't believe that I am going up against my brother. The person I admired for his strength, for his virtue, and for being able to perfectly utilize the power of Hysteria Mode.

But even more unbelievable was what Kana had said earlier.

"...I see. You have been through a lot of difficulties as well."

Kana's gentle voice.

"What...do you mean?"

"It was too obvious for my eyes. It's vexing to admit, but it seems I-U is developing people even outside."

I-U.

I broke into sweat upon hearing that word from Kana.

I-U is a secret organization resembling a system of school where Riko, Jeanne, and Vlad were members of. I-U is also responsible for placing a false crime on Aria's mother.

"Kana... You were in I-U.....?"

Kana pursed her lips from my inquiry. Silence passed between us together with the night's sea breeze.

"Why!? What were you doing in that kind of organization!?"

Kana shook her head sideways,

"I can't tell you about it yet... I don't want to put you in danger. Kinji, just don't ask anything and lend me your assistance right now."

and responded with that.

A negative emotion between anger and desperation swelled inside me.

Tears, for whatever reason causing it, even blurred my eyes.

"Kinji, you have always followed everything I said. There has not been once that you disobeyed me, right? So come with me."

Kana, with her gentle, nostalgic voice, said those words as if whispering it to me.

Ahh...

You're right.

You're right, Kana... Nii-san.

I always believed in your words. Because you're kind, and strong, and correct more than anyone else I know.

That's why I did everything you have told me and was very happy upon doing it.

"I believe in you, Kinji. That you will lend me your help."

I lowered my head upon Kana's words, and shut my eyes as if to escape from this terrible reality.

Aria, why must you be killed...!

I flashed everything in my mind the different Arias that I've seen from the fights that we have been together, as well as the days that we spent together.

The Aria fearlessly fighting Riko Mine Lupin the 4th, Durandal Jeanne d'Arc, and Count Dracula Vlad.

The Aria who barged into my house one day. The Aria making a mess of peach bun's crumbs around the house. And the Aria watching her favorite animal show and making an excited clamor upon it.

"Come Kinji. We'll finish this work in one night."

The plane wreckage behind me, inside that, is where we each had our first and only kiss with each other.

Once I recalled that recollection, and at the same time of Kana's words...

"---!!!"

Even I don't know what I, myself did.

It appears that I drew my Beretta from the holster.

Aiming it at Kana.

With the Butei High---the place that I spent together with Aria---at my back...

I stood between them as if to protect it from Kana.

"....."

Kana...

...slightly widened her finely-crafted eyes.

What is the meaning of this?

Kana didn't say that, but she is asking me that question with her gaze.

Even I don't have the answer to that question.

Why am I pointing my gun at Kana?

She was the person that I have admired the most!

Why.....!?

"...It's not a wise action to blithely show your weapons."

Kana slightly sighed.

"Once you reveal your weapon, your enemy can instantly find out its specifications, its firing range, its ammo capacity, and even its strength and weaknesses. You should remember that."

---Bang!

A gunshot.

However, all I've seen was a flash that flared near Kana's hand.

At the same time of the gunshot...

Pyuu!

A strident sound assailed my right ear.

I know this since I have experienced this in Assault a lot of times before. This is the sound that a bullet makes when it grazes past your ear.

My body swayed to the left in the reflex reaction of dodging the bullet that passed by my right side.

(Ugh!)

I slipped off from the propeller's footing. Fortunately, I had instantly reached for my cable and prevented myself from falling to the ground in time, leaving my body suspended 3 meters below the propeller.

Placing my gun, which I miraculously have not dropped, back in the holster, I glared at Kana.

That was a gunshot just now.

But I didn't see her pull out her gun and shoot it.

I think that was one of Nii-san's techniques called 'Invisible Bullet'.

I have heard about it from Nii-san's colleagues before. I don't know how it works but just like the name implies, it was as if a bullet discharged from an invisible gun.

You wouldn't know when exactly the gun was actually drawn, when was it aimed, and when it was shot. It was a strike that disables the enemy's counteroffensive, let alone dodge it.

And right now, that skill which Kana had used in subduing countless criminals--- she actually used it on me, her younger brother.

Kana is standing on the end of the propeller...

Bang!

Another flash flared near Kana's waist, unleashing another bullet.

--No, I still couldn't see the gun.

\*Pishi\*

A subtle sensation ran near my hands. It left me flabbergasted as I stared at it.

The cable just below the propeller was gradually fraying, hinting at imminent breakage of it.

It seems the second invisible bullet grazed my cable.

What ungodly precision! She didn't choose to sever the cable as thin as a cellphone strap, but instead she went for grazing it!?

"I could have never foreseen this. I didn't expect Kinji to point a gun at me. It's as if a cat had went against a lion."

Kana is making a melancholic and conflicted face.

"Your strength and mine are like child and adult... no, maybe more than that. You are already aware of that difference, are you not?"

Yes. I know that too well.

I have no chance of winning against you even if I am in Hysteria Mode.

"...Yet, you dared oppose me?"

Kana asked, as if that doubt troubled her.

However, I am in no situation where I can give an answer. My cable will tear off soon.

I stretched my hands, intending to go back up the propeller, but the cable isn't used for normal climbing like ropes.

The more tension I placed on the cable, the faster it unraveled. I perceived that from the sway it made.

Then I'll just have to be careful not to sway the cable as I climb up...!

"...Kinji, are you close with Aria?"

Kana, making a troubled face, looked at me with a sidelong glance.

"---Do you like her?"

"What do you mean!?"

"I'm asking if you like Aria."

Being asked, I felt my blood rushing to my face.

"Why... are you asking me that!?"

Already having climbed the cable halfway up, I bared my fangs and yelled at Kana.

After Kana displayed a bit of incredulity, hesitation formed inside her eyes.

"...How can you still be that way despite your situation? I know you had been case-hardened by tough experiences ever since you were small. However, I can't understand it right now. Kinji, where within your heart is that power coming from?"

I didn't answer Kana, thus it seemed like Kana was asking herself instead. I reached towards the cable to climb further. At that moment...

Whoooosh!!

A gust of strong wind blew through the man-made island.

---Butsu---

By being pushed by the sudden gust, the cable got severed.

...And I was engulfed in darkness.

## 2nd Ammo: Emergency Mission -Quest Boost-

---

Ha--

I woke up in the midst of the morning light.

...

Only after a few seconds, did I realize the situation I was in.

Ah, hey...!

Hey, hey...

...All that...Was that a dream?

Right now I was sitting on the chair in front of my computer.

On my monitor, the screen saver, a Windows logo, was spinning around.

I shook the mouse, and the Flash that Riko made, along with some text saying 'Replay?' appeared on the screen together.

That's right.

I...saw this...and thought that before seeing Kana, I should take a nap, right...?

And then I...saw Nii-san, Kana...in a dream?

But in my dream, Kana said: "Kinji...let's kill Aria together"...!

I yanked the cable that had broken in the dream out of my pocket--but, it wasn't broken. Was it switched? Full of suspicion, I started examining the cable, but I was unable to tell whether it was the old one or a new one.

(--Aria.)

I suddenly stood up, hurriedly throwing open the door to the bedroom.

Over there...

Fyuu--

Fyuu--.

Aria was peacefully sleeping on the top bunk of one of the bunk beds.

Shii--one of her twin-tails drooped over the side of the bed, and her face was towards me.

Hehe. Smiling in her dream, she brought her hands to her mouth while making chewing motions in the air, as if she was chewing gum.

...It's enough to make me feel weak...that happy face while sleeping.

She's probably...eating her favorite peach buns inside her dream, right?

Fyuu. Relieved, I exhaled...which led me to notice that while I was sleeping, I had broken out into an uncomfortable cold sweat.

...That's right. That was a dream.

While showering, I reminded myself of that.

Butei Law article 9.

「Regardless of the situation, a Butei cannot kill」.

And Kana, as a Butei, could not have said anything like 'killing' anybody.

Kana...No matter how difficult the situation is, Kana is able to solve it by herself.

Able to rush into enemy territory to save people that other Butei had left for dead. Even those Butei that have been abandoned while carrying out the strategy are saved.

The amount of Butei who have fought together with Kana and died--are 0.

And that kind of Nii-san is incapable of ever saying things like 'killing' Aria.

Also...the Kana in my dream announced that she "would take Aria's life tonight."

That 'tonight', was last night. Which means that it's already passed.

Up until now, Kana has never broken any time restrictions she places on herself.

And Aria is still alive.

So that's definitely a dream--

It was, a nightmare.

--Probably.

I pretended that nothing had happened, and I asked, after getting up and changing uniforms--from today onwards, we would be wearing summer uniforms--about what happened with Aria yesterday...

"Yesterday night? Fwy (I) came back and saw Fyoo (you) sitting on the Fweah (chair) sleeping, right?"

Aria answered me while using her favorite strawberry toothpaste to brush her teeth.

Gurgle, Gurgle. Phoo.

Aria, having rinsed her mouth, took some milk out of the fridge, and after adding massive amounts of sugar, she gulped it down.



Brushing your teeth and then doing that...haven't you got the order wrong?

At this rate, you're going to have cavities.

During middle school, I had cavities on a molar on the top and on the bottom. I, having had ceramic fillings at the dentist, knew...cavities are very, very, very painful.

Thinking this while looking at Aria, who had been taught to drink colossal amounts of milk from God knows who, my--heart was still full of the remnants of last night's dream, and feelings like "This is the real Aria, she's still alive" continued to echo through my chest.

Ah, hey. Aria. Please don't use a flying kick to close the fridge.

It may be getting harder and harder to believe, but this was originally my room...

"...Aria."

"What is it?"

"Let's go to school together."

Checking my magazine, I slipped my Beretta into the holster, and for the first time--

I took the initiative in asking Aria to go to school.

"...How the winds have changed. You always act like it's so troublesome when I drag you to school with me." Her words may be harsh, but Aria's actions seemed to be a little happy as she picked up her backpack.

"Got your gun ready?"

Aria, hearing my question, widened her already big eyes in surprise...and she displayed her canines like a cat, smiling at me while drawing her silver M1911, waving it around in front of my face.

"Hah. Kinji is pretty alert today. Checking your equipment is a good habit."

Buzzz...On my bicycle, I rode through the cicadas, which had been buzzing since dawn.

Her hands resting on my shoulders, standing up on the two footrests on the back, was Aria.

If we had hurried, we could've made the bus, but for reasons unbeknown to even me, I didn't want Aria to take the normal route to school. My heart--appears to still be influenced by that dream.

...Anyways, I knew this already, but she really is very light.

"Biking to school once in a while is pretty comfortable."

"...Yeah, for the one who is not pedaling."

"I've been lax about this since I attended Butei High, but a Butei should always be ready against surprise attacks, and regularly take different routes. Also, this is way healthier than taking the bus."

"...For me, who is pedaling."

"Shall I make a hole in you?"

I complained twice, and she's already threatening me with violence.

Doesn't Japan have freedom of speech?

...For everyone's information, this is Aria's bicycle.

Aria had shown off this brand new shiny mountain bike before. That's why, when I suggested that we should use it to go to school, she flashed a face that said "Finally, there's a use for it!" and agreed.

But when I reached the parking lot, and took a look at the bike...the seat was raised until it could no longer go up, and attached to the back wheel, there were footrests for both feet.

From the start, you bought this for me to ride, right?

"But...Today, surprisingly, Kinji is acting like a Butei. Did you finally decide to start keeping pace with me? What happened?"

Aria asked, instinctively.

...How should I answer her?

Saying, I had a dream where you were killed...wouldn't be too good.

"About...about that. I'm your partner right? I'm just doing what I should."

I just said something random, half turning back, and Aria's camellia eyes blinked--

"Ye-yeah...That's right."

and she let loose a brilliant smile, even brighter than the summer sun.

Aria, suddenly seeming to be happy, randomly started to hop on top of the footrests, making the suspension groan and squeak, not able to take the force.

Ah, hey, stop jumping. How am I supposed to drive like this?

It looks like my partner-like actions made her really happy.

Parking Aria's bicycle in one of the school parking lots, we saw a crowd of students gathering in front of the notice board at Masters.

Seeing a familiar back in the midst of the crowd, I slowed my footsteps.

Jeanne. It's Jeanne d'Arc the 30th.

Looking closer, in her hand is a really thick walking stick.

"Jeanne."

Aria, following my gaze, shouted out that name.

Jeanne's hair fluttered as she turned her head around, and seeing us, she started making hand movements as if saying "Come over here."

Seeing Aria start striding towards her, I had no choice but to follow.

--I know that you're temporarily under the care of Butei High. But, this uniform doesn't fit you at all."

Aria, suddenly letting loose words that would make any listener think that she wasn't half Jeanne's size, insulted her.

Jeanne turned her head to one side, with a "Hmph."

"I was calling Tohyama. Not you, Kanzaki H. Aria."

"I have something I need to talk to you about. --Mother's trial, you'll testify, right?"

"...I understand, that was one of the clauses in the Plea Bargain anyway."

Aria's mother, who had false charges pressed onto her by I-U, Kanae-san was now--in Tokyo prison, awaiting trial with the Supreme Court.

She was sentenced to life imprisonment during her second trial, but if we can catch those criminals--and prove their guilt, we can loosen the sentence on Aria's mother.

Hearing Jeanne promise to testify for her mother's innocence, Aria smiled wickedly,

"Well, seeing as you're injured, I'll save the bullying for later."

and she straightened her flat chest, as if showing off.

"...I don't mind if we do it right now, you know?"

Jeanne, seemingly enraged by Aria's words, seemed to be looking for a fight.

"Did you say 'I don't mind'? Aren't you using a walking stick right now?"

"One leg is a fitting handicap. And inside this walking stick is the holy sword, Durandal. After it was broken by Hotogi Shirayuki, it was reforged into a saber."

As if trying to measure themselves up, their eyes locked...and sparks flew with a crackle.

"Alright, alright, let's not start fighting this early. Anyways, Jeanne...what happened to your leg?"

I quickly interrupted, asking Jeanne.

Also, Durandal...is hidden inside that walking stick?"

Treating an artifact like that is a little too much, right? Well, it has nothing to do with me.

"...It was a bug."

"A bug?"

"While I was walking, a scarab-like bug suddenly flew onto my knee."

"...Haa?"

"I was really scared. So I stuck my leg inside a roadside gutter."

"..."

"And I was struck by a bus that happened to pass by."

"...Hey..."

"Recovery will take two weeks."

Jeanne...as the saying goes, you're more than meets the eye, I never thought you were this clumsy.

Well, getting run over by a bus, yet only having a recovery time of two weeks. I can say "as expected of Jeanne" as well.

"...Well, never mind that, Tohyama. On this is your name."

My gaze shifted to the notice that Jeanne was pointing at.

Instead of a thumbtack, there was a dagger sticking the notice to the board. It said 'List of people who do not have enough credits - Final week', on the list of names...Yeah, I was on there.

'2A Tohyama Kinji Specialty:(Inquesta) Credit demerit: 1.9'

Credit demerit--1.9!

Seeing that number, I couldn't stop my face from twitching.

Butei High counts as a Japanese high school after all...so those students who are lacking in credits, as per the instructions of Ministry of Education, will be unable to graduate.

Therefore, for my 2nd year of High school, within one week--more accurately, before the beginning of the 2nd semester, I have to get 2 credits, or I won't be able to graduate.

These credits can be gotten by accepting commissions from civilians specific to your special study...but I...now that I think about, I've never taken any commissions. And that's all because of Aria.

Oh crap.

With this, I'm one step further from the normal world.

Hey, Butei High. I solved the plane-hijacking case right? Couldn't you give me some points for that?

"Looks like you're a delinquent, Tohyama. But, don't worry," said Jeanne, pointing at a notice next to it...stuck there was, a notice with 'Summer - Emergency Mission' written on it.

Yes, there's that.

Emergency Missions.

Having credit demerits is a common occurrence in Butei High, so the school will offer many contracts that require attention over the summer. If this was a regular high school, it would be like summer school.

These Emergency Missions might not pay a lot--but it'll make up for my credit demerit.

"Kinji's going to repeat a year? He's an idiot?"

"Shut up! I'm looking at it so I don't repeat a year!"

I pushed Aria, who had stuck her head in, away, and looked for a task that would fulfill my 1.9 credit demerit.

"Minato Investigate large-scale gold-sand theft (Inquesta, Informa)" ...1.7 credits. A shame.

"Minato Investigate iron-sand theft (Inquesta, Informa)" ...0.9 credits. Useless.

"Minato Investigate sand theft (Inquesta, Informa)" ...0.5 credits. Not even worth talking about.

Actually, why do all the requests from Minato have something to do with the theft of sand?

"Minato Casino 'Odaiba Golden Pyramidion' undercover security (Assault, Inquesta, other studies are also accepted)"

...1.9 credits.

"This is it...!"

I carefully confirmed the contents of the notice.

Prerequisite: Group members must carry a sword or a gun. There must be 4 group members. Preferably women. Uniforms provided--

...Accepting this will be a little awkward, but the only piece of work that will get me 1.9 credits is this one.

In the past few years, this has been the only casino that has been legally approved by Japan, and they regularly employ Butei to act as bodyguards. However, because things usually never happen there, it's been underestimated in the Butei world as 'work that will slow you down.' Which also means, perfect for me.

I hurriedly took note of the details, and I prepared my phone to send a message informing them of my acceptance...

But, I stopped in my tracks.

Aria was beside me, idly looking up at me--

If I accept this commission, I'll be leaving Aria alone for that period of time.

--"Let's kill Aria together."--

The words that the Kana in my dream said, seemed to echo out of nowhere.

"Aria."

This is laughable. I'm being scared by that kind of nightmare.

So...

So, I'll take care of it this way.

"Why don't you take this task with me?"

Ever since then, that dream, I've been increasingly uneasy about Aria's safety.

As if being pulled by invisible strings coming from my heart, I faced Aria.

"...Why? I'm not lacking credits."

Facing Aria, who was puffing out her cheeks, I--

"We're partners, right?"

returned just that sentence.

Hearing my words, Aria's camellia eyes widened, shocked for a moment.

Afterward, she started acting haughty, and she folded her arms, turning her body to one side, looking as if she was thinking about it.

"Hmm. How unexpected. Kinji wants me to go on a job with him. Well, I'll show some goodwill."

But I could see from the side of her face, that she was smiling. She can't possibly conceal the delight she feels for the first time I asked her to accompany me on a commission.

"Anyways, the notice says that at least 4 people are required...Alright. When partners are in trouble they have to help each other. It's fine if it's me, right?"

Tsuduri-sensei, who either had a hangover or had overdosed on whatever drugs she was taking, stopped speaking in the middle of second period. Third period was swimming lessons in the swimming pool.

But the part-time teacher for physical education, Ranbyou from Assault, just tossed down one sentence, "Use your guns to play water polo and play until two or three people are dead," before leaving.

That's how it went, so all the students are really troubled.

Is this school really normal?

I...was exhausted because I had slept on a chair yesterday, so I laid down on one of the deck chairs, playing with my cell phone.

If I do this, I'll be able to replenish my energy. After all, this is an indoor swimming pool, there won't be any sunlight. And, this may be an abnormal high school, but still, the boys and girls are separated during swimming lessons. So Aria isn't here to bother me, but...is she learning how to swim?

I remember now, she doesn't know how to swim.

I couldn't help but imagine her wearing a life ring, with floats wrapped around her wrists as well, but still drowning...

"Oi, there's nobody here! Hey, Shiranui, come up here, you're so annoying!"

Suddenly, the voice of Muto Goki from Logi rang out.

I sat up a bit, looking in that direction, but all I saw were some classmates putting a round, black object into the swimming pool. Those...are students from Logi and Amdo, right?

They're all wearing swimming trunks--Ugh, and a girl in a swimsuit as well, how hateful.

"Muto-kun! Float up right now! There's no time!"

...As I thought, it's Hiraga Aya-san from Amdo. I could tell from that special way of speaking.

I calmed down a bit. If it's her, I don't need to worry about going into Hysteria Mode. After all, naively wearing that swimsuit in the midst of a crowd of boys, it's more fitting to call her a 'child' rather than a girl.

However, I didn't think that she was naive enough to skip class.

"Right now? Hiraga-san, won't there be a problem if we don't preheat it?"

"Then modify that area! There's nothing that humans can't do!"

Hiraga, her short hair fluttering about, showing her ears, sat down next to the pool with a splash, laughing naively, all the while with a gigantic remote control inside her hands.

(What are they going to do...?)

Among the boys nobody noticed my inquisitive gaze, as they were busy putting a 1.5 meter long whale-like object into the pool using their combined strength.

Splash.

The top half of the object was floating inside the water, suddenly making a noise and moving...Only then did I finally realize that that was a model submarine.



From what I can see, it's remote controlled. Then, the thing in Hiraga's hands is the remote?

"We're firing!"

Following Hiraga's voice, on the back of the submarine, several small hatches popped open.

Pew Pew Pew! Blasts of fire were ejected from the holes, as if they were rockets.

"Whooh!" "Whooh!" "Whooh!"

All the people from Logi and Amdo applauded for Hiraga and Muto.

Hey, those jets of fire hit the roof, is this really OK?

Hiraga Aya...she's the grandchild of the Edo Period's inventor, Hiraga Gennai, a genius in mechanics.

I might say that she's naive, but she's the one that modified my Beretta...However, Hiraga's work may be powerful, but from time to time, there will be malfunctions. Also, her fee is huge.

My Beretta - Kinji Model is the same. I was fine with a modification allowing it to fire in full-auto, but now, when I use 3-burst fire, only 2 bullets come out. Also, they come out at pretty much the same time.

This kind of modification error, could you solve it for me for free?

"Hey, Kinji! Look at this! Super aqua-class nuclear submarine 'Vostok'!"

Noticing me, Muto--climbed out of the swimming pool, a broad smile all over his face.

"The story of 'Vostok' is tragic. It was a colossal nuclear submarine, the likes of which no one had seen before, but during 1979, after it had submerged, all trace of it was lost. And now, Hiraga-san and I have brought it back to life! How is it, Kinji!? Isn't it moving? Am I right?"

"Couldn't you at least do this in the outdoor swimming pool."

My rest having been disturbed, I directed these cold words at the pumped-up Muto.

If I continue to talk with this transportation Otaku, I'm going to go mad.

Muto muttered something like "Kinji really doesn't know the meaning of touching! Wait a minute, I'm going to crush you with the submarine!" and sat cross-legged by the swimming pool, appreciating that Vostok or whatever.

"Aha. I was forced out of the pool by those people."

Immediately following--was the person that had been in the same team as me back in Assault, Shiranui, walking over to me.

With both a well-muscled body as well as a handsome, sculpted face, Shiranui, sitting by my side, watched the remote control submarine bobbing up and down, chuckling.

Hey you, how can you be so cool while chuckling?

He obviously wanted to swim, but he had been forced out of the pool by Muto and company, yet he didn't seem to be angry at all.

This saint went quiet for a moment--

"Tohyama-kun, could I talk with you for a while?"

he said, showing his sparkling white teeth.

"There's no need to ask me for permission."

"I have some bad news that I need to tell you. Can I?"

"Bad news...? What's that supposed to mean? Well, if you want to, then say it."

"Just now second period was suspended, right?"

"That's right."

"At that time, while going to Assault, I saw a familiar face. Aria-san went too."

"Did something happen with Aria?"

"Haha. Don't give me such a scary look. It wasn't anything like that."

Shiranui seemed to have mistaken something, and he laughed lightly.

"...Does Kanzaki-san have a boyfriend?"

"I don't know. Why don't you ask Aria yourself."

"Tohyama-kun, you may have a rival in love, you know?"

"What's that supposed to mean."

"When Kanzaki-san was taking out her Butei handbook, I saw something...there was a photo of a boy inside. I didn't see it clearly, but it wasn't you."

".....That has nothing to do with me."

"Haha. You were silent for a second."

"I was just thinking about how you even report worthless things like that to me. That's why I was silent."

"You should pay more attention, Tohyama-kun. Kanzaki-san is pretty popular among the boys. If you delay it any longer, she'll be stolen away. This is just a saying, but Summer--is the season where a lot of couples form, you know?"

"I don't care. I've said this a thousand times already, Aria and I are just partners in a Butei squadron. Therefore, I don't need to know about Aria's private life."

"Tohyama-kun, your expression is really fierce."

"Hey-you-!"

When I had unthinkingly approached Shiranui--Shiranui performed a move he had learned from Assault, and deftly spun away from me. With a \*Shi\*, he snatched the cellphone from my deck chair.

--Hey!"

"Now that I think about it, Kanzaki-san said something. You're going to be security for the casino over the holidays, right? Well then, for the sake of practicing security in a crowded place, what do you think about going to the Summer Festival at Hikawa Shrine? Un. That's decided, then! Everybody says that that's a shrine of bonds. Isn't that right, Muto-kun?"

Shiranui fluidly tossed my cellphone over to Muto, sitting by the edge of the swimming pool.

Muto seemed to have been ready to catch the cellphone beforehand, and he smirked.

"Ooh! That's a really good idea! Then, I'll write an invitation message!"

Th-these two.

This perfected combination.

They've obviously planned this in advance.

"Hey, Muto! Give that back!"

Seeing me get angry for real, Shiranui turned around and he held me back with his arms.

"Oh my, seeing Tohyama-kun act that way for Kanzaki-san is really exciting. The boy in the photo--which proves the existence of a rival exists, so let us give you a hand! Muto and I had this discussion a moment ago. Ah. Also, there's some work that I have to leave the school for this afternoon. If you want to take revenge, then look for Muto!"

"Hoho, the name on the contacts list isn't Kanzaki..it's 'Aria'. You sure are close, Kinji."

Recently, because of Aria--the practical joker Muto, and for some reason, the person that he fits really well with, Shiranui, have always been like this.

Tap Tap Tap. Muto typed in the message at the speed of sound, as if he had thought about it beforehand.

"Dear Aria. As practice for being casino security, why don't we go to the Tanabata Festival together? 7:00 of the 7th, I'll be waiting for you in front of the panda at Ueno station. Wear a cute yukata, OK?' This should be fine right, Tohyama-sensei?"

"As if it would be fine!"

Muto bowed to me, who was shouting angrily at him, and Beep.

He pressed the send button.

After that, I pushed both of them into the pool--as for Muto, I targeted the tragic Vostok nuclear submarine, and watched them both sink beneath the surface, the Vostok in two pieces...

However, I can't erase the message that was already sent.

--What do I do?

(Unlucky...way too unlucky...)

Hmmm...A dark mist shrouding my body, I ascended to the Inquesta Building's third floor for class.

It was 5th period, the time for special studies.

The 4th period may have been English but Aria only entered right before she was going to be late, so I had no time to explain the message to her.

Now that I think about, as I sat down next to Aria, who was reading while humming a beautiful melody...For a moment, our eyes met...but then I felt that she turned away extremely hurriedly.

Could it be that she already read it?

I stealthily maneuvered my cellphone from under the desk, confirming the message that had been sent.

'Dear Aria. As practice for being casino security, why don't we go to the Tanabata Festival together? 7:00 of the 7th, I'll be waiting for you in front of the panda at Ueno station. Wear a cute yukata, OK?'

Absurd...

No matter how I think about it, this is way too absurd.

The whole text is full of words that can be easily misunderstood, leading me on a certain path to hell.

That bloody Muto. Only now does he have a talent in writing. This isn't what it's meant for.

Fuck. With Shiranui involved as well, I can only ignore it for now.

Click.

Uneasily, I finally, finally, checked my inbox.

Inside...Aria's reply was not present.

What am I doing?

"Nyaa..."

Suddenly hearing the noise of a kitten, I turned my head, only to see that next to me--in a seat next to the window, Riko was sound asleep.

That noise from just now, it seems to be her sleep-talking.

I'll think about Riko...and escape from this reality of Aria.

Ever since the battle with Vlad last month, Riko as of now--might still talk like the idiot she was before, but she hasn't been sticking close to me.

If you talk about distance, it's comparable with the level of contact a normal high-school girl has with others.

During summer, pointing a gun at my face was Riko. In battle, her glare, that of a beast, was Riko. From time to time, sexually harassing me was Riko. And also--like this, a normal idiot, was Riko.

How many faces do you have, exactly?

Well, this unpredictable Riko, might just be the real her.

Now that I think about it, recently, I've been able to talk with her normally.

And also, there's something I need to talk to her about.

I might not be able to ask her this in the classroom, but it's about Nii-san.

That, I must definitely ask her again.

While I was thinking that...

Shiiiii...

A summer-only beetle...?

No. Something like a female, black, rhinocerous beetle flew in from the window...

Oh...Oh?

Pa.

And it landed on Riko's right eyelid.

"Nyauh!"

Riko, as if she was a cat that had been trodden on, yelped, and started waving her hands around.

She brushed it off her face.

And that bug...Fyuu...flew out the window.

"...Hey, Riko. It's class right now, you should pay attention."

I warned her, whispering from the side.

But who knew that Riko, still in a haze, would stick the Yakult that she had bought beforehand into her mouth.

"Fuah, Fuauh"

"What are you trying to do? Ah, hey. Don't bite a hole in the cover. Drink it properly."

Ku. Gulping the whole thing down in one swallow, once again, Riko slumped back onto the desk with a thump.

"So hot~~~~"

Now, she grabbed her skirt from under the table, and she started fanning it.

She probably isn't talking to me.

"Summer is hot by nature. Telling me this is no use."

"It's--Hot!"

Fa Fa!~

Hey, hey, if you wave your skirt so enthusiastically, the Walther P99 will start firing.

"Be-be quiet. We're still in class. Anyways, the reason you're so hot is because you're wearing your modified cosplay uniform; if you don't cosplay, you won't be hot anymore."

"Lolita is all about tolerance! That's how it is!"

Pa!

Riko brought her hands to her head in a salute (is she saying her motto?), and she stood up with a \*whoosh\*

"Where are you going?"

"...To pee-pee."

It just went in, and now it's going out. Your digestive cycle sure is fast.

Also, don't use kindergarten language. It's amazingly depressing.

Anyways, looking at the bear-san strap on her cellphone, Riko, with the atmosphere of a 'Sleeping Beauty', walked out of the room in a dignified manner. Watching her, I--

Suddenly realized that I didn't know how somebody who had such a weak character could be the Head of Staff for the teachers under the Inquesta department. Female, 22 years old, single, Takamagahara Yutori was looking this way, with tears in her eyes. Suddenly she straightened up, and returned her gaze to the textbook.

Sensei. I'm actually paying a lot of attention.

So please don't subtract my credits.

The vanilla scent that Riko had dispersed by waving her skirt around like a fan still lingered, and in the midst of it, I returned my attention to the class.

The main topic of today's class is Sherlock Holmes.

He was alive during the 19th century in the English Empire, and he would travel all around the world, solving innumerable difficult and unusual cases. It would be wholly correct to say that he's unmatched as history's greatest detective.

And, not only is he the world's greatest detective, but he also holds the equally prestigious title of the world's strongest detective.

The reason this is said is because Sherlock Holmes was a master at battle techniques, western swordsmanship and marksmanship — he serves as the basis for Butei as, all in all, a great existence. One could say that he was ahead of his time by 100 years, an impeccable genius.

(Well, his granddaughter is like that, though.)

While following random trains of thought in my head, I had come back to Aria once again, and I couldn't help but look down at the cellphone by my side...

--Kinji."

Riko had returned from the bathroom, noiselessly.

And that expression was completely different from her idle expression from just now.

Tingle. Something ran up back, sending chills down my spine.

That gaze--it's as sharp as a beast's.

This was what I had seen during the plane-jacking, the gaze of Riko the 'Butei Killer'.

Confirming that the teacher was drawing something on the chalkboard, her back towards us, Riko, at roughly the same time as I started to frown, \*whoosh\*.

grabbed my tie, and rammed a finger into my throat, not even allowing me to make one noise.

"--!"

Then, she yanked at my belt, and with a completely noiseless motion--

She threw me out the open window!

"!"

Riipp. The cable attached to my belt slowed my descent. In that moment just now, it looks like Riko attached the cable in my belt to the windowsill.

--What is it? What's going on!

Next to me, who had just fallen to the ground from a 3rd floor window, \*thump\*.

Riko, not even needing a cable, glided down, with the aid of her skirt--

And into my ear, she said something that sent my body into shock.

"Kinji, head to Assault, quickly! Just now, the Butei High websites reported something--Aria is fighting with Kana, as we speak!"

Riko, who said we should split up for some unknown reason, and I parted ways, leaving me to rush towards the Assault building by myself.

Kana.

Kana and Aria are--battling!

Which means, that nightmare...

Wasn't a dream, but reality--!

So, that was reality?

--Let's kill Aria together--"

Those words echoed around in my head.

(Aria!)

I collided with the door, throwing it open, and I made my way through the corridor, bumping into several students as I went past. My feet kept on criss-crossing, as if I was about to fall--and I rushed into gym #1.

The gym in Assault only holds the name of gymnasium...it's actually a battle practice ground.

From within the bulletproof glass, in the center of the arena...came gunshots.

Somebody in there is fighting--who might it be, and who could they be fighting with!

"Ou-out of my way! Get out of my way, now!"

I pushed aside the groups of people with my hands, and ran towards the gunshots.

"I never thought that the Sapporo Butei High would have this many amazing female students--I've never even heard of them!" "It looks like Kanzaki's rumor of invincibility is about to broken." "How is she doing that, I can't even see her open fire..!?"

The assault students that I had pushed out of my way, shouted excitedly.

"GO GO GO GO GO! KEEP ON GOING UNTIL ONE DIES!"

Hearing those shouts, I raised my head and saw that through the bulletproof glass, a well-built woman was wielding a 2-meter long nodachi--Ranbyou.

Stomping on the bulletproof glass with threadbare shoes was Ranbyou, 19 years old this year.

Her age may be similar to ours, but she's a female Butei so renowned in Hong Kong that her very name strikes fear into criminals' hearts.

After that, she may have become a teacher...but because of excessive and continued violence, she's been discharged from several Butei highs, and so she keeps moving around.

"--Aria!"

I shouted, rushing in front of the bulletproof glass, and on the other side, within the sand-storm inside the arena--

--Was Kana.

Kana was wearing a female Butei High uniform, looking down on Aria, who had dropped to a kneeling position.

"Let's go, Kanzaki H. Aria. Let me--see more."

Her dazzling, beautiful face holding a disappointed expression, Kana...Bang!

Fired a bullet, faster than they eye could see.

Pa! A ferocious thud rang out from Aria's body, as if she had been violently smashed with a hammer, making my heart stop.

Kana's bullet. Hit her.

Thud!

Aria groaned, and she collapsed to the floor, as if she had been struck by an invisible knee.

There was no blood. It looks like it hit her bulletproof equipment.

The bulletproof armaments of Butei High are made of TNK fiber, able to stop bullets, not allowing them to pierce the body of the recipient. However, there's no way of reducing the impact of the bullet.

From experience, those who take a bullet while wearing the a vest feel like they've been violently struck with an iron ball.

The impact is so great that, if the recipient is unlucky, his organs will be damaged or ruptured, leading to death.

And of course, if the head is hit--

"Ranbyou, stop them! No matter how you look at it, this is illegal!  
Somebody will die!"

Sparring using real bullets and real guns is one of Assault's lessons.

But while sparring, the participants have to equip Class C Armament, protecting their entire body.

"Oh, let them die, let them die! For the sake of learning, graciously die in front of the crowd!"

Ranbyou, shouting something that an instructor should never dare say, \*gurgle\*.

Her queue swished through the air, as she threw her head back and brought her hands up to take a drink of beer from a gourd.

(That idiot...! Is she drunk again!)

I, giving up on Ranbyou stopping the fight, opened the bulletproof door with my IC.

Woah! The people surrounding me cried out, but they had no time to stop me. Barging into the arena, which was full of the acrid smell of gunpowder, I ran towards Aria and Kana, not caring about being in danger.

"Kana, stop!"

"Hey, bloody Tohyama! Don't interrupt a lady's classes! Do you want me blow your brains out!"

Thud!

Following the gunshot, echoing like thunder, Ranbyou's bullet hit the ground by my foot.

That gun is the world's most colossal handgun. The M500, nicknamed 'Elephant Killer'.

The impact, comparable to that of a landmine, led me to stumble forwards--but even with that, I continued to charge towards Kana!

"...Kinji?"

Taking advantage of the opening Kana showed when she looked at me--Aria, on the ground, holstered her two guns, and she sprung up with a backflip, her feet aimed towards Kana's chin.

And Kana dodged the attack by moving her head slightly.

--Take this!"

Aria, drawing her guns before she even hit the ground, tried to hit Kana from point-blank range--

Thud. Thud.

But Kana, looking back at her, used both her hands to push away her wrists, skewing the line of fire of the barrels.

--!"

Click Click! Click Click!

Aria, repeatedly pulling the trigger, opened the bolt of the guns.

Both of them were empty.

--But Aria took advantage of this exchange, and she flashed over to Kana's back.

And she threw her guns far into the air--

And she drew her two wakizashi in a movement as fluid and deadly as lightning, slicing down at Kana's back!

--Kya!"

This was a reversal, a sneak attack on Kana's back.

Seeing Aria, who had been caught up in Kana's flow the whole match, perform a reversal, the assembled students went "Oooh!!"

...It's useless, Aria. Kana has no weakpoints...!

Clank--!!

Chiii...

Clatter. Clatter.

Aria's wakizashi...spun through the air, thudding to the ground on the left and right of the arena.

Nobody saw anything.

All they saw was Kana's long hair drawing an arc in the air.

--Scorpio.

This move, invisible to normal eyes, was nicknamed that.

This is how Kana reacts to enemies that managed to get behind her.

"Haa...Haa."

Aria, her breathing erratic--stumbled, stumbled, and hopped back, retreating a few steps. Those footfalls were obviously unstable.



A line of blood flowed out of her lips.

It looks like during Kana's movement just now, she also delivered a blow so fast that no-one could see it, to Aria's chin.

"Haa...haa...the...the gun just now... was a 'Peacemaker', wasn't it...?"

Aria, in the midst of this predicament, still had the gaze of a lion cub. Her fighting spirit hadn't waned at all.

--You're well informed. That's right. My gun, a Colt SAA--is nicknamed, Peacemaker. However, you weren't able to see it, right?"

"I could...understand. From the sound of the gunshot and action. Because it's such a model that is already out of use, an old gun, Haa, Haa...I only realized it now."

"Then, let me show you more."

Bang!

From the right of Kana, something flashed, and Aria's twin tails violently jumped, flying backwards.

"Uwaah!"

Aria, seemingly hit in the chest, slumped to the floor. Her hands seemed to be out of energy.

Stop it! She's at her limit!

She may be wearing a bulletproof outfit, but at this rate, Aria will die!

"Aria, run away!"

My Beretta drawn and aimed at Kana, I--charged over, gritting my teeth, trying to get in between Aria, who was getting up, and Kana, preparing to fire again.

Bang! Bang!

Kana shot two bullets at the same time. They brushed past my sides, and buried themselves in the ground next to Aria's waist.

(--Uu!)

My body felt like it had been impacted by two baseball bats, and I bent over in agony.

The anguish made my consciousness start to go hazy, giving me the feeling that I was vomiting all my organs out my mouth.

But, my gun hadn't wavered--!

I can't point the barrel away from Kana!

"Ge-get away...Kinji...!"

The voice coming from my back led me to turn my head around in panic.

Aria, slumped on the floor, was grabbing on to my pants, trying to climb back up.

Her knee was obviously trembling, and she couldn't even lift her head properly--

Click.

But, she held my butterfly knife in her hands, seemingly having extracted it from my pocket, having felt it there.

"Get away, Kinji."

Kana, saying exactly the same thing as Aria, ordered me.

"These reckless acts of yours, interfering from the outside, make it easier for a mistake to be made during our spar. It's dangerous."

"I know that, I don't need you to tell me...!"

"Since you know, then why're you risking your life like this? You're not trying to become my enemy, are you? The inexperienced you, even with all the luck in the world on your side, could not possibly beat me---"

"I know that too!!!"

Screaming ferociously, I--

"Kinji..."

made Kana widen her eyes a little.

That was--like the one in my nightmare, on Empty Island. An expression of surprise.

"...you've changed."

That voice was inexplicably cold--Not only was her voice chilling, but it seemed to carry a hint of understanding. Kana--looked at me, then looked at Aria, before turning towards the entrance of the sparring arena.

I followed her gaze to the entrance, only to see...

"Ah, hey! What are you guys doing!"

I'm afraid that it was a small police officer from the Navy, pushing students out of her path, entering Assault.

So--it looks like there was somebody who couldn't bear to watch this, and reported it.

"You're under arrest! Everybody in this area is to be taken into custody!"

Beeep! Hearing the female officer blowing on her whistle, the students looked at each other, in panic.

"You people! Break it up! Immediately!"

Such a small officer shouted in such a loud voice, running over to us.

I just noticed that Kana's uninterested gaze at the officer seemed to be a little drowsy--

...

.....

And I saw his hand reach up to his mouth...

"...Mmmm..."

Wow.

She yawned, without a hint of agitation.

...Her fighting spirit, evaporated...?

Right...That's right. You're approaching 'that time'. Nii-san.

From another direction, the bulletproof barrier this time,

"Kuh"

Ranbyou, extremely dissatisfied, jumped from the top of it, turning her head, looking at all the students.

Enveloped by a killing intent which radiated, "Get the hell out of here!", she chased all the students out. The drunken Ranbyou is amazingly unpredictable.

Ranbyou, taking big strides over here, \*Thud\*

bent her body, taller than mine, even though she was a girl, a fist smacking into the officer's head.

"Kuh. How dare you act out this bloody game, and mess up my fun. Wait a minute, and I'll bring you to Masters--Mine Riko."

Mine?...Riko?

I frowned, only to see the female officer--

"...Hehe. Hehehehe."

--twitching her face, laughing.

It's Riko's voice.

This female officer...was Riko in disguise!

Next to me, my eyes widened in surprise, Kana chuckled.

She turned around, and with another yawn, she left the arena.

Fyuu...

Finally relaxing, I covered the areas by my sides that had been grazed, kneeling.

Looking back worriedly--all I saw was that Aria, still standing up, had fainted.

Hardly unexpected.

She was enduring excruciating amounts of agony. I was amazed that she was even able to stay conscious up to this point.

Aria's knees began to bend at last, inexorably descending-- \*thud\*

--until they hit the floor.

"Aria...!!"

Wanting to rush to Aria's side, I had my face twisted into a 「^」 shape by Ranbyou.

"Why're you so panicked, idiot."

"Pani...she almost got killed!"

"You've really become a piece of trash since leaving Assault, Tohyama. That girl, before noticing Mine Riko's horrible acting--had no killing intent at all!"

What...?

Kana had no killing intent?

From the start...she wasn't trying to kill Aria?

Ranbyou...is a Butei renowned for her ability to read people, whether they be Butei or offenders. She has animal-like senses when it comes to that.

While I was still in Assault, I had been stunned by her prowess several times--so I knew that Ranbyou's sharp senses were to be trusted, even if she's drunk.

"That girl's techniques will help to teach these little brats. It just looks like she's trying to kill her opponent. If she really had killing intent--I would've taken care of her myself."

Hehe...Ranbyou, befitting of her name, laughed ferociously, just like a leopard.<sup>[1]</sup>

Just as I was about to carry her to Ambulace, the fast-recovering Aria regained consciousness. However, she didn't say anything to me.

I bumped into a lot of Butei High students before reaching the infirmary...but it seems that Aria has no friends in Assault, so nobody came to help her. Well, Aria got beaten up as everybody looked on, after all. With that in mind, they might find it hard to strike up a conversation with her.

The students in Ambulace and Medica had all gone to the Butei Hospital to learn, so nobody was there. And Riko, still wearing that police uniform, had

disappeared. So as the only one left, I couldn't help but bandage Aria, first letting her lie down on the bed...taking out an antiseptic spray from the medicine cabinet.

"...Why did you stop me."

Hearing that trembling voice, I turned my head, seeing Aria hang her head in exhaustion, sitting on the bed, hugging her legs to herself.

"Even if I hadn't stopped you, the victor had already been decided."

"You're wrong!"

Aria's seiyuu-like voice rang out, hysterically.

But, she still didn't raise her head.

As if denying reality, she kept it tucked behind her knees.

"If you hadn't interfered, I had plenty of methods to win!"

"Don't beat yourself up, Nii...Kana's distance away from you was obvious to anyone that was watching."

--Even if our battle abilities are that far apart, I still have to win!"

Not willing to admit defeat, Aria's twin-tails fluttered over her knees, as she shouted.

"That was Kana! That was the person that Riko disguised herself as at Koumeikan, you...your past friend...the woman that could make you shiver from just looking at her! She suddenly appeared in Assault, and asked me to spar with her. I couldn't run away, nor could I lose to her! But you--!"

"Aria, I hope you understand. In this world, there are many Butei that are stronger than you,"

"No! No! I have to be strong! Even if I can repeal the sentence...mother is still in prison! And the sentence of lifetime imprisonment won't disappear! I-if I'm not strong...then I can't...I can't...save mother...!"

Uuu, uuu...

Aria couldn't help but cry.

"That's right, you're very strong. You're very strong. That I know for certain."

I...put my hand on Aria's shoulder, lightly.

"So--I hope that you have the strength to accept defeat as well. If you fight again, you will be killed."

"..."

"Don't fight with Kana anymore."

"...."

"Got it?"

"....."

Under my persuasion, Aria...

Stayed silent.

Still silent, she nodded.

This girl.

Once she realizes she's in the wrong, she has the bad habit of not saying a word.

"Don't puff your cheeks out like that. You look like a puffer fish."

Hearing my words, Aria, whether because she was hurt or out of energy, I don't know, but--Thud!

she hung her head, and thundered a fist to my chest.

"Hey...!"

Thud Thud! Thud Thud Thud!

Aria, sitting on chair, continued to hit me randomly.

"Hey, why do I have to be your punching bag?"

"Shut up, Shut up, Shut up! Someone like you, get out of here!"

Aria, reverting to child form, saw that I had retreated beyond the range of her short limbs--

Fyuu! Thud!

And she threw the canister of antiseptic spray at my head.

Forced out of the room by Aria, I decided to head back to the dormitory, since I had nothing else to do.

The classes today have already ended. I was worried about whether Kana would attack again, but if she did, I wouldn't help anyway...also Kana seems to be getting near to 'that time'.

She probably won't visit anytime soon.

Thinking practically, I went through the door of my apartment--

"--!"

Walking into the living room, I immediately fell on my butt.

And my head smashed against the wall, with a Thud!

'All the strength had left my body', would be an appropriate description.

Reason being, against the blazing scarlet sunset, on the sofa...

was Kana, sleeping!

(...Ka...Kana...!)

I started to think that I was fantasizing, but that was without a doubt, the real Kana. I could see her reflected in the mirror on the bookshelf against the wall.

Once Kana goes to sleep--she would sleep an unbelievable amount of time.

If you'd like to know how long, it's not unheard of that she would sleep for two weeks without getting up.

This is because of the pressure that Hysteria Mode places on the nervous system, especially the tremendous stress it places on the brain.

Even I, whose Hysteria Mode can only last less than an hour, will feel a great desire to sleep afterward. And Nii-san sustains Hysteria Mode for the whole day after becoming Kana...so the exhaustion that stacks up on the nervous system will lead to an inconceivable amount of time spent sleeping.

From now, Kana will enter a hazy state, needing to sleep for a few minutes a time...and before half a day, she will enter 'Sleep Mode' and sleep for around 10 days.

The reason that I relaxed my guard after seeing Kana yawn, was because I knew this.

However, thinking about where he was going to sleep, I...never thought that he would come back to my apartment.

"Mmm...Kinji?"

Kana, apparently having heard my head smashing against the wall, woke up and said that, her eyes still closed.

"You went to Ambulace. However, you didn't treat yourself. Come,"

"...You seem to be clear. You didn't see it, though."

"The smell of antiseptic spray is lingering, yet it's faint. Those people whose sides are hurting have unsteady footfalls. People give a lot of clues, just from their gait. Remember that."

Kana, opening her eyes, slapped her hand on the first-aid kit on the table with a \*Thud!\*

For the purpose of treating me...was that why she brought it here?

"Come. I'll bandage you."

"There's no need."

I turned my head away, not looking at Kana, who's voice alone was enough to hold me prisoner.

"It's only a scratch!" "It's only a scratch!"

Just like a mirror, Kana said the same thing as me at the exact same time.

While I was thinking about whether she had the ability to read minds, Kana seized the moment,

Whoosh. Whoosh.

and gestured towards me, smiling.

I...met Kana's gaze again, and walked over...

Thud.

In this abnormal atmosphere, I felt all will to resist drain away, and I sat down next to Kana, helplessly.

I felt the need to hear an explanation at least once.

Kana removed the uniform on my body, exposing my flanks.

Not only was medicine used, but a needle was procured as well, treating my wounds with care.

This treatment is far more intricate and effective than that of the teachers in Medica...the pain faded away, not even leaving a trace of its existence.

(Nii-san...)

From such a close distance, illuminated by the sunset, his face--was filled with the tenderness of a brother.

That's right.

Kana was...always better at healing than harming.

Not only was he qualified as a doctor overseas, but after finishing a commission by a particularly wealthy person, he used the gigantic remuneration to construct a hospital for the poor.

Kana, Nii-san...

is somebody who would never leave behind those that are hurt, or in pain. That is a fact.

And the reason Nii-san uses this strange method--entering Hysteria Mode of his own will...is because when we were children, after mother died, he would disguise himself as her and comfort me.

--That, Nii-san.

More gentle and caring than anybody else, Nii-san.

Why.

--Why would he do something like that?

I want to say it. I have to say it. I have to find the truth behind Aria's situation.

But...I'm scared.

I'm scared that the answer will, leave the image in my heart of Kana, of Nii-san--broken--

"...Kinji. Have you been earning your credits?"

Hearing Kana suddenly talk about my education, I raised my head.

"...I don't have enough. But I've accepted work as security at the casino. There's no need for Kana to worry."

"HSS - Can you use Hysteria Mode at will yet? I'm worried about how weak Kinji is to women."

...I think that your 'antibiotic'<sup>[2]</sup> as it were, is far more worrying than my weakness.

"...Kinji is someone that can do anything he sets his mind to. Your Hysteria Mode definitely holds a power greater than mine--than even the first of our bloodline, Tohyama Kinshirou. However, you've always been at a loss when it comes to girls. Hmph. You're more like an 'unmotivated hero,' right?"

said Kana while bandaging me.

"Can you just leave that aspect alone?"

"And while you're not in Hysteria Mode, you're an even more worrying normal high school boy. When I pulled you up by the cable after you dropped off the wind turbine, you had already fainted. You even made me switch your cable and send you back here...really, you've always needed someone to take care of you."

That was...Kana who saved me?

Well, the person who pushed me off in the first place, was Kana.

Kana, reflected in the mirror on the bookshelf, tenderly caressed my head.

...In Kana's heart, I'll always be a child.

When I was about to speak up in protest.

Crackle...

The atmosphere seemed to tense up--

"Kinji, be careful. There's an enemy...approaching you."

--Enemy?

I looked back at Kana, who had suddenly spoken, \*click\*

The sound of someone opening the main entrance reached my ears,

"...I'm back."

That voice, still annoyed, belonged to--

Aria!

Startled, I leaped off the sofa, rushing towards the entrance.

"Kinji, are you here? Um, just now...I'm sorry. I was a little hasty..."

No! No! Don't come in!

Kana is in here!

The person who beat you till you were half-dead, Kana--is in here!

"Aria, don't come in here!"

I stood in front of the door, trying to block her from opening it.

"Wh-what is it?"

"It's fine, so go back!"

Aria, having never seen me so aggressive before, blinked in surprise.

"Anyways, go somewhere else tonight! Don't stay around Butei High either!"

As long as I can delay until tomorrow, Kana will go to sleep somewhere.

Before that, I can't let Kana get close to Aria--!

"...!?"

Aria, her gaze flashing into the room for a second, frowned.

For the sake of preventing the meeting between Kana and Aria, I used my body as a shield, blocking Aria's path.

I can't leave a line of fire. Because Kana's 'Invisible Bullet' could appear at any time.

Also, \*click\*... I closed the bulletproof door behind me.

"I saw Kana inside."

The vinyl bag Aria is carrying contains peach buns. Eel buns are also mixed in, which she probably intended to give me for apology. That hand holding the bag, started to tremble.

"...I finally, understand. So-so this is how it is, Kinji."

Shi. Both of her eyes widened, staring at me, Aria--

"So the one who instigated Kana was you! You wanted to leave my squadron!"

"Wh-what the hell are you talking about?"

"I can't be wrong, that's how it is! The reason you've been acting so much like a partner is...because you thought that this was the end, and you were playing with me, right! You ma-made me to get happy over nothing, but act-actually you were laughing at me inside!"

"Ah....hey, Aria!"

Baring her canines, Aria seemed like she was about to charge me.

Looks like her defeat at the Assault arena gave Aria, who had been brought to the boiling point of anger like a water heater, a huge shock.

Her lack of reasoning in normal situations was now amplified, making the entire thing a mess.

"What are you doing! You're acting like the whole world is your enemy just because you lost once!"

"You....you wanted to leave me! So you instigated your ex-lover...partner! You bastard! I-I've been watching you become more and more like a Butei--and I was so happy! But, but! You! Idiot Kinji!"

"Wrong! Ka-Kana isn't my lover!"

"Then what is she?!"

Facing Aria, who was shouting in a shrill voice while baring her teeth, I couldn't say that he was my brother.

If I tell her the truth, she'll definitely scream, "What kind of stupid thing are you saying, Idiot Kinji!", and she'll be even more angry.

"...!"

Seeing that I wasn't answering, Aria--Uu!

suddenly put on a cute face...

Tears started to fall from those big, round eyes.

"It is, isn't it! Why won't you answer me! What is Kana to you! Why are you two alone in a room together! Why do you want me to 'get out'! Uu, anyways--you, you were laughing about how smoothly your plan went, weren't you! And celebrating the success with that demon!"

--Wrong!"

Kana, Nii-san isn't a demon--

Right now, that's the thing...the thing that I don't want to think of!

Th-this is probably just a bad coincidence, which is why things have devolved--until the situation is the way it is now. However, the real Kana--for me, is just like a God!

"Kana! You demon! Get out of here! I'm going to make a hole in you! Kinji... Kinji... KINJI IS MINE!"

Thud!

Returning to reality, I had pushed Aria away, as if trying to distance her from Kana.

--Bang!!

I even drew my Beretta, firing a warning shot by her foot.

"...!"

The plastic bag in Aria's hand fell to the floor--and those camellia eyes opened wide in shock, staring at me in a daze.

I myself was shocked into a stupor by my own actions.

That was also a reflex. When you're assaulting an agitated offender, you have to put some distance between yourselves before firing a warning shot, preventing them from moving forward. This was a sequence I had practiced hundreds and hundreds of times in Assault, until the very memory was engraved into my body.

But, how could I do that to Aria...

Aria may always be pointing her guns at me, but I've never fired on Aria before.

...Knowing Aria's usual patterns, I thought that she would draw her M1911 for sure...

But, I was wrong.

It looks like the fact that I would shoot her has deeply hurt her soul--

"...It's...over..."

Aria's hands covered her face.

Under those fragile arms, tears, like little streams, ran down her cheeks--

"...Everyone has... Everyone has abandoned me..."

I was wondering whether she was talking to herself or not, when she turned around, seeming to not even have enough energy to run...She staggered out, and disappeared into the corridor of the apartment.

That small back...should I chase it?

Should I explain everything to her?

But in the end--I didn't do any of it...

Unable to do anything else, I just picked up the plastic bag, full of peach buns.

And returned to the room-- Kana was laughing.

"I'm sorry. I heard everything."

--He was laughing.

"...What's so funny. This...is all your fault."

"It looks like she really likes you. She even shouted 'Kinji is mine!', you know."

Thud!

I smashed the gun, tightly gripped in my hand, against the wall.

I may not be Aria, but I really feel like finding a random person to vent my anger on.

"It was really worth it to resist the urge to sleep, and come here."

Kana, seeming to think it hilarious, laughed again.

Having just seen our fight...she was suddenly very happy.

"That night, pointing your gun at me surprised me--but, my predictions were correct. This is how it is. That, really does exist. It's just that you yourselves--haven't realized it."

Kana's mysterious words only served to make me frown.

"Are you drowsy already, Kana? What are you saying? What is that all supposed to mean?"

"...It's a type of 'chain'. For now, at least."

--A chain?

"There are a lot of weird people in the Holmes bloodline, I was puzzling over that this morning. Because I was unable to believe that Kinji would ever point a gun at me--to protect a girl from that bloodline. Therefore, I wanted to find out what kind of girl she was. I wanted to see Kanzaki H. Aria. Therefore, I went to Assault for a little interruption."

Kana didn't pay any attention to me, although I hadn't put my gun away, and he stood up from the sofa.

--Just now, I already told Riko. I'm going to go to 'sleep'. There's a hotel reserved in Odaiba."

"After you wake, will you kill Aria?"

I asked Kana, who was striding towards the door--

"I won't kill her."

"...Can I trust you?"

"I wouldn't lie about something important like that. As long as 'second chance' exists, I won't kill her."

...a 'second chance'...?

Kana, looking directly into my eyes, said something strange.

"As long as'? Which means, if that chance disappears, you'll assault her again? What is this 'second chance' you're talking about?"

"...I'm sorry, I can't tell you that. I wouldn't want you to be too curious."

Kana, putting on his shoes with a flowing movement, stood up soundlessly, turning his head.

"Genesis 2:18--It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him--"

Quoting scripture once again, Kana looked through the room, which had been painted by the rays of the setting sun, spilling through the glass--

"Remember this, Kinji. Aria is a dangerous girl. A girl that must have someone by her side. If that 'someone' is you...I'll be very proud."

--staring at the bright, scarlet, sunset.

## 3rd Ammo: Summer Festival

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In the end, Aria didn't return after that.

Two days. Three days. It had been close to a week, and she still hadn't returned. This was the longest period of time she had ever left home.

At this rate, she might never come back--I couldn't help but think that, in my heart.

Aria still attended the normal classes, but she was radiating an atmosphere that said "Don't you dare talk to me." I've been brave enough to ignore that atmosphere several times, trying to talk to her about our security detail at the casino...but, she always ran away.

As the days passed like this, the school entered the weeks approaching final exams, and I had no opportunity to find Aria and speak to her...

Time flew by, and the summer vacation started.

Emergency missions are an integral part of the holiday, so Butei High's summer holiday starts a bit earlier, on July 7.

And on that day, the 7th.

Because it was such an easy day to remember, it came to me immediately after I had gotten up. Muto had used my cellphone without permission, to write a message to Aria, saying this.

'Dear Aria. As practice for being casino security, why don't we go to the Tanabata Festival together? 7:00 of the 7th, I'll be waiting for you in front of the panda at Ueno station. Wear a cute yukata, OK?'

Reading this mail may give me a strong urge to take out my gun and commit suicide...

But, Aria read this mail, right?

Aria hadn't replied at the time, and after the fight about Kana, she had never mentioned it either.

Does that mean that she might not have seen it?

Chances are she's never used messages before.

"Hmph..."

So, why did I come to Ueno station?

In front of the crowds of people in yukata, I forced myself back to reality, and hurriedly put the cellphone that I had been idly staring at back into my pocket.

Right now it's the 7th of July, 7 o'clock--minus 5 minutes.

Actually, I had arrived here 30 minutes in advance, lingering inside the bookshop, reading books.

I...I'm not thinking about Aria...

I'm just getting ready to go to the Ueno Hikawa Shrine for the Tanabata festival.

Just because there's a high chance for crime during these incidents, so as a Butei, I have to face it voluntarily, strictly controlling the chance of crime...Ah, I'm such an idiot.

If that were truly the case, why am I walking around the panda?

Ah, that...that's just coincidence.

I'm just looking as I pass by.

I'm not especially looking for Aria. It's just that there's a crowd gathering over there, so I should go and investigate. That's how it is.

Dipping my head, looking at my watch while striding out of the ticket office, I...stood in front of the at least 3-meter tall model panda.

Aria...

(...)

...She's not here.

Looking around...of course, she isn't here.

Well, that's to be expected.

I didn't know whether she saw the message in the first place, and she got so angry over the incident over Kana as well.

Anyways, I had confirmed that she wouldn't be here anyways.

So this pans out exactly as I predicted. That's how it is.

"..."

My shoulders drooped, and I sighed, facing the glass box embedded into the panda.

Around me...were couples who had arranged to meet here, all wearing yukata. Ah...really, it's painful to wait. Alone by myself, wearing a bulletproof uniform, in this kind of place...

But, well, I'll just stay vigilant for a little while longer.

She might just be late.

...No.

Ah...Hmph, I'm just staying alert around here. Who knows whether something might come up.

As I was about to buy something to drink, looking towards the vending machine--

"?"

--Shi.

Something pink hurriedly concealed itself behind the other side of the panda.

"..."

It looks really familiar.

Anyways...I can't be wrong.

That...Isn't that one of Aria's twin-tails?

That body that looked like Aria--No, Aria, was hiding behind the backside of the panda.

However, she was only hiding her head, not knowing that her tails were sticking out.

...Aria.

In the whole of Ueno, only you could have tails that color.

"...Aria."

I called out, and the tail moved a little, with a Pa!

I was noticed! How!?

It gave off that kind of feeling.

Hey, trying to stay unnoticed with something as obvious as that would be really difficult, right?

"Aria."

"....Nyaa, nyaa."

...Is she imitating a cat? No way.

She seems to be trying to get me to think, "Looks like the movement over there was just a cat."

What...what kind of stupid hiding technique is that? And really, your imitation is completely off... "Your voice is way too obvious. Doing that is like announcing that you're Aria."

I said, moving to the back of the panda. Wearing a yukata, Aria...

Clack! She stood up, her wooden slippers hitting the ground.

--You're late!"

She raised her beautiful, slender eyebrows at me ferociously, baring her canines.

Hey, I got here on time.

Thinking this, I waved my watch in front of her face...

"Ah...Hmph, if you're going to call me out on an appointment, then you should be early by 30 minutes! I'll make a hole in you if you make me wait! Making me wait 30 minutes means you deserve some holes! I'll make them until you're a volcano!"

You...you were here 30 minutes ago?

Then, if you were waiting, why did you need to hide when you saw me?

I wanted to say that, but I couldn't get the words out.

Because Aria, wearing a yukata, was really...

Aah, damn it.

--way too cute.

What kind of feeling is this?

It's different from the feeling I get when I'm entering Hysteria Mode. It feels like I've had something taken away from me, making me feel light.

The theme of Aria's clothing was pink and red, wearing a yukata with a goldfish pattern. It fit her small stature really well. Too well, in fact.

It's unbelievable that she managed to find such a fitting yukata, marveling at that in my heart, I felt a smile rise up, inexplicably.

"Wh-what is it. Why're you staring at me like that. You're such a pervert."

I'm not sure what she misconstrued the wonder on my face as, but Aria's cheeks reddened, and she smoothed over her obi and chest with an agitated movement. It looks like not talking to me for a while has left her feeling nervous.

"...That idiotic message, did you see it?"

"Hmph"

I asked her, scratching the back of my head, and Aria stopped for a moment,

"Ye-yeah, I came because it said that this would be practice for our casino security detail. I didn't even think about going to the festival with you, not even a little bit."

...Was there really a need to say that, then?

Aria--waved her hands around, raising the tip of her nose.



"Once I accept a commission, I'll definitely fulfill it. Even if it's for a stupid reason like fulfilling your credit demerit, I won't change my conviction. This is 100%, purely for the sake of completing the security mission."

...you picked an amazingly cute yukata just for the sake of completing a security mission?

Anyways...it looks like the message is getting more, and more, unexplainable.

Aria insisted that she came for the sake of being 'security'. That's a good thing for a Butei, leaving me unable to reject that premise by saying, "that message was a prank by Muto." I can only go with the flow, now.

Well, that incident...it isn't surprising that things turned out this way.

And I, who had been tearing my hair out over that message for the past weeks, am really damn stupid.

"...Then, let's go. To be security."

"...Yeah. Let's go and be security. Just security. Security."

Aria, repeating the word 'security' three times--seemed to have the words "I want to go to the festival" written on her back, and the noise from her wooden slippers started up again, as she followed the crowd.

Ah...that back. A gun was stuck into her obi. It's just like Aria to do something like that.

Following the JR national highway, next to Ueno station, we reached a boulevard with stalls set up on both sides.

We may have had a huge fight over Kana, but Aria and I are companions in battle who have gone through many life-threatening situations before. Thanks to our experiences together, even if a gap had opened between us...we continued to walk together, with a "let's set aside what happened before," atmosphere.

"...Woah..."

Aria, seemingly having never seen a Japanese festival before, was immediately drawn in by the extravagantly decorated booths, and the happy clamor of the crowd.

We strode through the gaps in the crowd...and Aria suddenly stopped in front of one of the booths.

This one was selling cotton candy.

Aria's gaze fixed upon the Oji-san, who was rolling the sugar strands, which really were like cotton, onto a pair of disposable chopsticks.

Her double-fold eyelids blinking several times, still staring at the cotton candy, Aria asked,

"Kinji, what is that?"

"That...is cotton candy. It says so right over there."

"Candy...so, you can eat it?"

Aria looked up at me from below, her face filled with surprise.

"It's for kids to eat, you know?"

I whispered into her ear, and Aria's face suddenly reddened--

"I-I-I...I didn't say I wanted to eat it!"

Something like drool was appearing in the corners of her mouth as she bared her teeth at me.

That...isn't it too fast to have your mouth watering already?

However, having spent so much time with Aria before, I understood...when this girl goes into this mode, it means "I really want to eat it."

If I don't let her eat it now, she'll be unhappy, and the chance of an M1911 finding its way into her hands will increase by a lot.

"Looks like there's nothing I can do...could I have one stick of cotton candy, please?"

With no other options left, I entered the plastic curtains of the booth.

Whoosh! Aria followed with inhuman speed.

But the tiny Aria was only slightly taller than the counter, and only her head was sticking above it.

"Oji-san! Can I choose a flavor?"

Hearing Aria's question, the oji-san answered,

"Of course you can!"

Oh, you can choose.

"Is there a peach bun flavor?"

As if there would.

"There is."

There is!?

Next to me, who was stunned, Aria's eyes were glowing in anticipation as she watched the cotton candy being born.

Spin, spin, spin...

"Here. Your girlfriend is really cute, so I'll give you a bonus."

The oji-san handed over the slightly bigger peach bun flavored (!?) cotton candy over to me.

"...Sh-she isn't my girlfriend."

Said I, answering him.

Aria accepted the cotton candy from my hands,

"Kinji! Where should I start eating!?"

Her eyes sparkling with delight, she skipped around, continuously tugging at my sleeve.

Geez, you're still a kid. Really.

After that, takoyaki, candied apples, chocolate bananas...etc., everything that came into Aria's sights was immediately devoured. Worrying about her status as a Butei, I couldn't help but ask, "Aren't you worried about your weight?"

"In the previous physical examination, I was lighter than Riko, who's about the same height as me, so there's no problem."

Aria answered, displeased with my question.

But hey, isn't that weight difference created by the difference in chest size?

But now that I think about it, Aria-sama has eaten her fill, and she's in a pretty good mood, but the goldfish at the goldfish catching stall seemed to sense Aria's ferocious nature, and they swam away with great speed, leaving Aria with an empty net. Opposed to her, I had caught quite a few, piquing the princess' interest. And as for target practice, well, if we had gone, it would be too unfair...so we passed it by.

"No matter the country--when the festivals come around, everybody is so excited. It's very easy for crimes to appear at times like these. Make sure you remain vigilant."

Facing Aria, who said these sorts of things once in a while, I couldn't help but think that "You're the one that's most excited, right?", but I didn't dare say it out loud.

Afterward...noticing the Tanabata bamboo sticks, Aria asked me, with a puzzled look on her face, what it was, and when I had just answered that you were supposed to write down your wishes and hang them up...

--Woah!

The happy voices of the crowd rang out.

"...?"

Looking around, I saw a gigantic **Mikoshi** heading towards us from Aria's direction.

In its wake, the people followed, streaming towards us, just like rivulets of water.

Straining her back with an "Uuunn," Aria tried to take a look at the Mikoshi, but she was jostled around by the rushing crowd--

"Eh, ah, huh?"

Only leaving those words behind, her tiny body was swallowed up by the crowd.

This isn't good.

If we're caught up in the flow of people, we'll be separated.

"Aria, over here."

I called out, reaching my hand over to where I had heard that seiyuu-like voice.

A tiny hand grasped hold of mine, through the gaps in the crowd.

Making my way through the chaotic mob, and finally reaching something like a clearing, I--

Pull!

extracted Aria from within the crowd.

Shi. Aria, leaving the crowd with difficulty, followed the Mikoshi with her eyes, her other hand wiping away the cold sweat that had broken out on her forehead.

"Fi-finally. The thing that came out...what was it?"

"That's called a Mikoshi. I'm glad that we weren't separated. Otherwise, I'd be forced to broadcast a notice for a missing child."

Following Aria's gaze, I looked at the majestic Mikoshi as well.

And for the minute that we had made our way through the street, which we were looking down at now...

Was my hand, and another hand.

--!

My hand and Aria's hand.

Aria's hand and my hand.

Aren't we tightly holding each others hands right now!?

".....!!"

".....!!"

The greatest tension that had risen ever since I met Aria four months ago, seeped between us.

Aria, looked at me, then looked at our hands, locked together, then looked back at me, and her face, like a stove, which happened to be out of season right now, reddened until it started radiating heat.

Wanting to let go of my hand--Aria, seeming to think that, appeared to have a system error in her brain...and, squeeze. Squeeze. Squeeze. She continued to add force.

Squeeze. Squeeze. Squeeze.

Squeeze. Squeeze. Squeeze--!

M-my hand! It's going to break! Is this the hand strength granted by her limit break?!

--Whoosh!!

Finally, tearing her hand away from mine, Aria...

Raised her arm in front of her body, making an expression that seemed to convey that she was ordering the demon in her hand to "Stay down...!" Her fingers were frozen in a claw-like position.

"Yo-yo...you...Pervert Kinji!!"

I didn't understand why she would call me that, but that hand--Whoosh!

--smashed into me.

Oh my Father in heaven, hallowed be your name... lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil.<sup>[3]</sup>.

Aria, who seemed to have enough of the large crowds, and I, with a left black eye, avoiding the couples that had come to visit, went around to the back of the main hall, which was empty...and we sat down on what appeared to be a wooden railing.

Thud. Thud. Thud.

In the sky, which had already turned pitch black...fireworks, like flowers of light coming into bloom, exploded.

This seemed to be the first time seeing Japanese fireworks for Aria, and she continued to look up at the brilliant night sky.

Aria...is a girl that really matches with summer. She may not know how to swim, but I think that...ah.

--The fireworks stopped, and once again, the sky twinkled with the light of the stars.

At the back of the main hall is a vast forest, and the quiet sounds of birds and insects reached our ears.

It really is summer.

... ...

... ... ...

"You know," "Um,"

Both of us seemed to have something to say, and our eyes met.

"Ah, what is it? You go first."

"No, you should go first."

We continued to back and forth like this...after we had listened to the buzzing of the insects for a while...

"About Kana...How do I say this...I'm sorry."

Aria apologized to me, embarrassed.

"I lost to Kana. It may have taken some time, but I realized it. You weren't wrong. The world has Butei more powerful than me, and now--I feel that battling with her let me learn a lot. And, also, I already vaguely understood..."

Aria...dipped her head, extremely embarrassed.

--She, wasn't your past lover, right?"

Saying this, Aria's face looked like she had realized this using her sharp intuition.

I fell silent. As if searching my soul, Aria...turned her gaze towards me.

"But, she isn't a stranger to you. Between you two, there seems to be an even stronger bond."

She may not even be able to imagine that Kana is my 'Nii-san', but...

Aria truly is the great-grandchild of the world's greatest detective, Sherlock Holmes.

That sharp insight could be said to have exposed the relationship between Nii-san and me.

"About that, I'm going to cut to the chase...after this...are you going to be Kana's partner?"

It's a shame that you treat me like a dog most of the time.

"...I won't. That isn't the relationship between Kana and I--and our abilities are too far apart, anyways."

Hearing my straight-out denial, Aria, fyuu...

Looked as if these words had put her heart to rest.

It looks like the matter with Kana is what worries Aria the most.

"However, Kana--for you, is a dangerous existence. I don't know why, but you've already become her target. You need to be careful."

"Ah, yeah."

"Also...I'm going to take this opportunity to repeat this. Before, you said that I wanted to cut all ties with you...but I, didn't even want to be a Butei, originally."

Now that I think about it, entering Butei High--

Was 100% of my own free will.

For the sake of fulfilling my duty as the inheritor of Hysteria Mode, I was determined, as a descendant of Tohyama, to be an 'ally of justice'...

That's why I wanted to become something like that. I probably just thought that it was something that I should do, and I went with the flow.

But...after Nii-san disappeared last year, I decided to leave my life as a Butei behind.

And this month, I met Kana--Nii-san again, but all it did was reinforce my desire to quit being a Butei.

Originally not even willing to hurt a fly, Nii-san...said something like "killing", and a fellow Butei like Aria as well...

He's changed.

I don't understand why Nii-san would say something like this. But, the most obvious reason is that, he is a Butei. Only this--is absolute.

"So April next year, I'm going to leave Butei High. No matter what you say."

But, at least I myself--for the sake of not becoming like Nii-san, can give up on being a Butei.

And I can become a normal person, living a normal life.

That is the right path. Definitely.

Just...

"Um...I know. But...even though I know, I..."

My face relaxed a bit, looking towards the mouth that emitted that seiyuu-like voice, which said that she understood, yet she seemed more lost than ever.

Just...ah.

Aria.

I made one other oath.

--For a little longer, in just that short amount of time...I will be your strength--

You are fighting, using that tiny body of yours to face your cruel fate, always fighting.

Not, like me...running away.

Therefore--

"Just that...Butei Law article 8, I will definitely keep it."

Well, I'll make sure of it now.

"Article 8---"

"「Your mission must be resolved completely」. Before April of next year, I am still a Butei...and before that, I cannot go against any articles of Butei Law. And also, as a person, I cannot go against my own word. So until we completely resolve the matter with I-U, I will always remain by your side."

"Kinji...!"

Don't make such an excited sound.

"Also, even though it was against my will...With you, I've already defeated Riko, Jeanne, and Vlad, these three members of I-U. Naturally, you're not only the one that I-U has their sights on, I have been targeted as well. We will fight until one side has been completely destroyed. Aa~hh. I've been sucked into something so troublesome. It makes my head hurt."

Like that, partially on purpose...I stated my reasons, as if I was trying to convince myself.

Aria...dipped her head.

And afterwards, \*spin\*

Her back towards me...

Shi.

Shiii.

She suddenly blew her nose.

Thinking that it was impossible for her to have caught a cold like this, I turned my head.

...I didn't know why, but Aria walked a few steps, and then she spun around. Her twin-tails drew a graceful arc in the air, but her back was still facing me.

...Really, she's amazingly good at making others angry.

I climbed onto the veranda, approaching Aria's face. Shi.

Shii. Aria swiveled like a chess-piece, not showing me her face.

Shii. I chased her, \*spin\*, but Aria continued to turn.

"What kind of reaction is this?"

I grasped her hand and turned her towards me.

"Ah..."

Aria, looked up at me helplessly...

...against all expectation, she was crying.

...Out of joy, she was crying.

Those eyes, streaming tears down her face like a sparkling, silver stream, were sparkling.

"I will always remain by your side." How could these simple words of mine...make you happy enough to cry.

"Ah, um..."

'I'm sorry' is what I wanted to say, but no, apologizing would be weird...while I stayed silent, at a loss of what to do.

"Uu?"

Aria's mouth emitted a noise that sounded like her mouth had been stuck together by konnyaku.

...What is it now?

"Uiee."

Uiee?

I looked at Aria, who had her mouth twisted into a 「^」 shape...

"Migyaaaaaaaaaa!"

What!?

Aria suddenly jumped off the veranda.

Hey, what's wrong...

You're getting more and more weird, you know? Has your 'feelings' server been overloaded?

As I was thinking this, Aria accidentally trod on the hem of her yukata, Thud!

And with a movement that outclassed any comedy routines, she fell flat on her face.

And just like a caught goldfish, she started going into spasms on the floor.

"Aahaha! Wa-wait! No, NONO! U-U-U-Uwa!"

Her entire body curled up, she started to open the neckline of her yukata!

"Wa-wait! What the hell are you doing! I have no idea what is happening!"

"Ki-Ki-Ki-Kin-Kinji, think of something! I-I think something got inside my clothes!"

"Hey, are you alright!?"

She looked extremely uncomfortable inside the yukata, so with a \*whoosh\* I grabbed hold of the obi on her back, thinking of loosening it for her.

And--

Buzz...

A beetle that looked like a scarab flew out of the yukata...Tap.

And it landed on a tree, not far from here.

Ah--

So she was tickled by a bug who got into her yukata.

Is that it? What was I worrying for...I was really shocked for a second.

"...Kyaa..."

Aria, Thump.

Along with the completely loosened yukata, she fell onto the veranda.

My face twitching, I looked at the second thing to be victorious over Aria, after Kana, the Almighty-Scarab.

Hmm...? For some reason, that looks a little different from a scarab. I've never seen a bug like that before.

But it looks kind of familiar...

As if avoiding my gaze, it flew into the dense forest with a buzzing noise.

"...That, what kind of perverted bug is that...climbing around in these weird kinds of places...!"

I didn't know when, but Aria had fixed her yukata with inhuman speed, and she stood back up, gripping her guns.

Hey...Are you going to use that high-caliber pistol to shoot an insect?

My face still twitching, I picked up the things that had been scattered from out of Aria's yukata. There was an extremely small makeup box that looked like it had been ordered from abroad, and some lotion. This...is makeup? There's mascara as well. Hey, why are you so dedicated to bringing these things?

Thinking about this, holding these objects in my hand, I...suddenly halted.

--Butei Handbook.

Fallen out of Aria's yukata, open on the floor, inside...I could see a photo of a boy, slightly sticking out.

A boy--a photo of someone other than me.

"Tohyama-kun, you might have a rival in love you know?"

I don't know why...I really have no idea why, but Shiranui's words echoed in my mind.

No...so what? This has nothing to do with me.

Even Aria, once she lays down her guns, is just a high-school girl in a co-ed school. Even if she's bad at things that have to do with romance...having one or two crushes isn't abnormal at all. Actually, that would be considered normal.

"Ah."

Aria said, and she bent down, picking the Butei Handbook off the floor, putting it back into her flat chest.

That expression...makes me feel a little panicked.

"...That should be it. Check if I missed anything."

I put the makeup that dropped onto the ground back into Aria's purse, and I handed it back over.

She took it in hand, and looked at me closely.

Afterward, those camellia eyes turned their gaze back to the Butei Handbook.

What. I never said anything about that photo.

"...Why are you unhappy all of a sudden."

"I'm not."

"You saw the photo, right?"

--Your intuition is too good, Aria.

Because she had completely hit the mark, I couldn't find a fitting excuse.

"I don't care about that either."

"Care...what's that supposed to mean. You're putting on that kind of face...I don't want you to misunderstand anything."

Aria, \*brush\*

-slid onto the edge of the veranda, just like a child, and with a \*Pa! Pa!\* she patted the ground beside her.

She's telling me to sit down, right?

...Guess there's nothing else I can do.

I...sat next to Aria.

"Normally, people would put photos of their parents, or their siblings."

Saying that, Aria showed me the photo inside her handbook--As I thought, it's a boy.

"He is both the smartest, and the strongest person in the world. An amazingly perfect person. And--"

This boy, wearing these ancient clothes, with a collected air about him...

He doesn't look similar at all, but for some reason, I felt that in some places...he looked like Aria.

--he's somebody that's no longer on this Earth."

That photo was old enough that I believed Aria's words without a second thought.

And, it's a black and white photograph. And even those shades of gray aren't as clear anymore.

This is...I've seen him before.

He may be younger in this photo than the ones inside the Inquesta textbook, but I could still recognize him as the strongest detective in the world--

"Sherlock Holmes the first. My great-grandfather."

"...You respect him a lot, don't you."

"With all my heart. This is a photo that father gave me. Not only do I always keep it with me, but is a pillar of my soul, my most precious treasure...I've never shown this to anybody else."

"Didn't you just show it to me?"

Hearing my small joke, Aria softly, solemnly, and proudly, closed the book.

Afterward, she descended from the veranda...and, her cheeks slightly red, turned around.

--Kinji is the only one I've ever shown this to."

Returning home, I ushered Aria, who was following me from behind, inside.

Aria hadn't returned here in a long time...It's natural...but I felt a little awkward.

Shirayuki wasn't here either, it was only the two of us.

Trying to act as if I was completely ignorant of that fact, I opened the package that had arrived just as I had left the house to go meet Aria.

"...What is this?"

Using a knife to cut open the box, I saw that...the inside was filled with clothes and accessories.

The sender is TCA. The casino managers of the casino in Odaiba.

From the attached note, these are for the mission that I took to fulfill my credit demerit--clothes necessary for the security detail at the casino.

"What is this?"

Aria approached me, and read the note.

"These are things to be used for the security duty at the casino. This note says 'For the sake of not disturbing the customers' experience at the casino, please dress up as casino staff while carrying out your security duty.'"

"So that's what it is. I can understand this. This is pretty common when guarding a place of entertainment."

"Yeah. Customers only have time to play once in a while, they probably wouldn't be able to fully enjoy themselves if they saw Butei wandering around."

If the size of one's clothing doesn't match, then one's movements are heavily impaired. Because of this, an iron-clad rule for Butei is, in the event that you receive clothes for a security exercise, then you have to try them on before the actual operation.

Because of this, Aria and I, who didn't really have anything to do anyways, decided to try on the clothes.

From the explanation, my role is..."young IT CEO". What on Earth is that?

I may have been a little vehement, but it's impossible for someone like me, who suffers from a supreme lack of motivation, to be a CEO.

But, since these are my client's instructions, all I can do is follow them.

With that...I wore a suit that looked like it belonged to a nouveau riche gambler. Oh, I have to wear cologne as well? This...really doesn't fit me at all.

But at least, these clothes are made out of bulletproof fibers. I know that. Aria's clothes should be as well.

"Wh...what is...this..."

Hearing Aria's voice, irregular, coming from the bedroom, I turned my head.

"What is it? Aria, is there a problem?"

And...Click.

I opened the door to the bedroom.

Aria, noticing my reflection in the full-body mirror--jumped with a start, pa!

Her ears were standing up.

Rabbit ears.

"I-idiot Kinji!"

Slam!

Spinning around, her two fists raised, adopting a stance like that of a brown bear roaring, Aria--looked at her body, which was wearing something that looked like a black swimsuit, panicked, and she gave up on attacking me.

"D-d-d-d-didn't I tell you to knock before you opened the door! Don't look!"

Her back facing me, she curled up, trying to cover her body with her hands.

Shake Shake--

Shaking from embarrassment, her bunny tail was just like a ball of fur. But I understood that...Aria is...

wearing a Bunny Girl uniform.

Now that I think about it...they do exist in casinos. Bunny girls, that is.

"Get out of here! Pervert! Pervert Kinji! Kanji you parvert!"

Kanji you parvert...? Aah. She was trying to say "Kinji you pervert!" but bit her tongue.

That Aria. Every time she makes up insults that are hard to say like that, this happens.

But, Aria as a bunny girl is...

Amazingly, amazingly cute.

The situation may seem like it, but there's no danger of me going into Hysteria Mode. Bunny girl suits are supposed to be worn by well-endowed women after all.

Wearing this with a kindergarten-like body, it doesn't fit her. It doesn't fit her at all. Of course it doesn't match. But these kinds of thoughts are probably still safe. I just need to think of it as a costume.

"Ah, not m-my back! If you dare to look I'll make a hole in you! I'm going to make a hole in you!"

Hearing her words, I noticed that on the back of Aria's bunny suit was a V-shaped opening, showing her soft, creamy white skin for all to see.

Shii, Shii. On the back that Aria's hands were desperately trying to cover, on the left side...

There was a scar left by a bullet.

This...

I understand that you're both nobility and a girl, and as such, you feel embarrassed.

But a Butei with no scars at all, doesn't exist.

So don't be embarrassed. That's like a badge of honor.

"Hey. It doesn't matter what you have on your back, you know."

Remembering that Aria had also gone into this state when wearing a maid uniform, I couldn't help but be surprised. This girl, Aria, will get amazingly embarrassed once she dresses up.

As a Butei, shouldn't you fix that?

"It's just a piece of clothing, tolerate it. Well, I'm the one that's making you help, so I shouldn't say anything, but Butei are required to wear different types of clothing throughout different operations. Alright. So that we don't look weird during the job, let's just stay like this for while, so we get used to it."

"Uuu~~~~~"

Aria, having been taught a lesson about being a Butei by me, moaned, extremely unhappy, while straightening her back, tears in her eyes.

Afterward, \*spin\*. Her twin-tails and rabbit ears twirled around, facing me.

...Hmm?

This weird feeling is...what is it? Right now, Aria is...

I stroked my chin, using the observation skills that I had picked up during my time in Inquesta.

...

....

Oh, I get it.

Her chest is a lot bigger than normal.

Was there some stuffing inside the clothes?

But anyways, to begin with, bunny girls are supposed to have big chests.

If Aria, who had an unfortunate chest, were to wear this, the gigantic void between her chest and the uniform is...well...extremely pitiful.

"A-

Thud!--ria, you've finally shown your true colors. I'm going down to the Tokyo District Prosecutor's office to lay charges.

After hearing me say one syllable, Aria seemed to have guessed what I was going to say, and she executed a vicious kick, sending my body flying into a 「<」 character--No, a 「つ」 character.

"Chest pads are in fashion! Chest pads are for those who are well-dressed! Chest! Pads! Are guiltless!" Accompanying every "!" came a foot hurtling towards my head. Aria didn't even let me explain myself, leaving me unable to do anything but scramble backwards--Thud!

(Uu...!?)

Aria's high heels smashed into the ground next to my head, leaving her legs spread right over my head.

Uu....u?

....Eh...?

The core of my body--suddenly turned red hot.

I-

-am going into Hysteria Mode...? No, it's too late, I'm changing already!

Wh-what is this, Kinji!?

Earlier, I thought that there wouldn't be a problem too.

I nearly got stepped on by Aria, and it was just a coincidence that her legs were across my face. I'm going to change with that? That's so weird!

Which means, this is bad.

This is the bedroom.

If I actually become that gigolo-like Hysteria Mode in here.

It'll be exactly like how I was locked into that Ambulace room by Shirayuki last month--

It's going to become an unsalvageable situation!

--Kin-chan! What's wrong!"

Right, that's how Shirayuki was at that time...umm...

Ha?

Shira...Shirayuki...?

Bang! Throwing open the door with both hands was--

Dressed in her normal Miko garments, seeming to have come a long way with a huge burden...

Surname: Hotogi. First name: Shirayuki--

Hotogi Shirayuki herself.

Those pitch black eyes, widened with fear that I was in some kind of danger--

saw bunny girl Aria, stepping on my forehead with her high-heels while crossing her arms.

Rustle, rustle, rustle! She advanced ferociously.

"Kanzaki H. Aria...! U, uu, ufufufufufufu..."

Her eyes, normally calm and composed, seemed to be blasting out lasers, filled with an immeasurable fury.

Afterward, Shirayuki bowed her head as if saying "I'm very sorry," the shadow cast by her fringe obscuring her eyes.

Shaaa.

The Hotogi armed Miko seemed to have released her limit break, an indescribable killing intent flowing out of her, saturating the room.

If I had a weak heart, I'd definitely have died from fear by this point.

--Kin-chan, I'm back."

We-welcome back.

"I'm sorry."

Shirayuki, who loves to apologize, apologized to me in advance.

What is it. What are you apologizing for?

"...During my Hotogi divination, I divined that Kin-chan had some 'rabbit difficulty', so once I finished my work I rushed back. And, thinking that something like this would happen...I brought 'that'.

Thud...

I, even with all the strict training that Aria had given me, felt my heart stop.

"No-no-not that, Shirayuki! I-I've said this before, you can't use that!"

Faster than my cry of terror by a moment--Clatter!

From within Shirayuki's hakama, the sound of some heavy, iron object hitting the floor rang out.

"That's why I apologized to you!"

Shouting that, Shirayuki raised the object, and like a spring, click click click!

She assembled it with the speed of lightning.

And Shirayuki--Click!

Held it, setting it up.

Leaving Aria and I speechless--

was an M60 HMG.

It was an American weapon, made for war, a HMG weighing tens of kilograms!

Having this in Japan is obviously a crime. It's a weapon of mass destruction that cannot be brought under the attention of the police.

Shirayuki lifted it with just her right hand, her left hand reaching into her white clothes, pulling out an ammo belt and attaching it to the gun.

Hey, hey, are you Rambo!?

"You--Fox Spirit! Daring to wear these lewd clothes, pla-playing these kinds of lewd games with Kin-chan-sama--I sentence you to 10000 deaths!! 10000 deaths! TEN THOUSAND DEATHS!!! WHICH MEANS, YOU SHOULD DIE TEN THOUSAND TIMES!"

"Wh-wh-wh-what is this girl! She's always going crazy like this!"

Aria, understanding the massive difference in firepower with just once glance, didn't draw her guns, but backed up against the wall.

Clink!

Shirayuki's eyes seemed to be saying--DIE!--, springing wide open, and she aimed in this direction.

Shirayuki, Shirayuki! Me! Me! I'm in front of your barrel too!

"Die, Kanzaki H. Aria! This is divine retribution! Divine retribution! Aha, ahahahahahaha!"

--DADADADADADADADADADADADADA!

NATO bullets, the barrage of hellfire that the M60 spit out, reduced the room to shreds.

Aria, just like a ninja, escaped to the ceiling of the room, and the Shirayuki in berserk mode was laughing hysterically, turning the barrel of the gun, reducing the ceiling to a honeycomb, I--

In the midst of the flying splinters and debris, fearing for my life, I jumped out of the window of the bedroom--Click!

I used up another of my nine lives, falling onto the metal safety net, embedding my shape into it.

...How on earth can I...

living in this place, have a normal life.

Hey, Shirayuki. Seeing a rabbit stepping on me, what kind of game did you think we were playing...

I haven't understood this yet, but it seems that your divinations are a violation of human privacy.

Within Hysteria Mode, there lies something else, called "Meza Hysteria". It's just something I called it though. Arousal isn't something like a light switch, something that you can turn on and off at will, rather, it's something that comes on slowly.

If something like that happens while I'm changing, because my Hysteria Mode is still too shallow, it will stop at "Meza Hysteria"--and just for a short while, my abilities will increase by a little.

And in this mode, while escaping from the M60's barrage, jumping out towards the bay, I noticed something strange.

An abnormality that needs investigation.

The reason I say this, is that, when I crashed through the window, I noticed that one of the pitch black windows in the 2nd female dormitory flashed with reflected light.

From my experience...that should be some sort of binoculars, or telescope, that flashed.

It's probably just something that I imagined, but if there really is somebody observing us, things would get more difficult. If a teacher starts an investigation about the M60, and I get punished or put into jail for breaking the law, then it would be really troublesome.

So, I walked across the safety net, returning to the front of the boy's dormitory...

Then I hurried over to the 2nd girl's dormitory.

If I had a choice, I definitely wouldn't do it, disturbing this kind of place at night.

But quickly confirming information that might be detrimental to you is the basics of being a Butei.

The room where binoculars flashed--on the top floor of the girl's dormitory--should be here...

In the corridor, I frowned, standing in front of the suspected room.

...There's no name tag.

I don't know whose room it is.

When I pressed the doorbell, nobody came out either.

Is it an empty room? Or could it be that only one person stays here?

I'm really useless...out of my Meza Hysteria already, I had no idea how to react.

While I stood there, helplessly scratching my head, suddenly--

Tap! Tap Tap!

Something, whom I hadn't heard at all, touched my waist from behind.

"U-uwah!?"

Turning around, all I saw was a gigantic white dog--

No, it's a wolf, biting the leopon strap that's hanging out of my pocket.

Th-this silver wolf.

I've seen it before.

I remember, it's the one who infiltrated Butei High last month, the one we finally caught after chasing it all around.

The one I caught with the genius of Snipe--Reki!

"Haimaki, stop it. That's something that belongs to Kinji-san."

Suddenly hearing Reki's voice, I looked up.

In front of my eyes, wearing Butei High's summer uniform, Reki, her face emotionless as usual, was talking to the wolf.

Not only does Reki, shouldering her sniper rifle, make zero sound while moving, I couldn't even sense her breathing--without me noticing, she had suddenly appeared behind my back.

Having been reprimanded by Reki's monotone voice, the silver wolf--released the lepon, and it sat down.

It looked at Reki, exactly like an obedient child, but to me...it seemed to be full of hostility.

Hey, what is that attitude supposed to mean?

"..."

Reki still hadn't taken off her headphones, which she had been wearing all day long. And her face, as pretty as a CG, was still impassive.

She probably had just come back from buying something. In her hand was a bag from a convenience store.

"... ..."

Why don't you say something. You're exactly like a doll this way.

"About that. I have something that I need to talk to you about."

Unable to bear the silence any longer, I said that, and Reki...used her keycard to open her door.

And afterward--so, this was her room after all--bringing her wolf, she entered, wordlessly.

"Ah, um. It's fine if I tell you this at the door..."

Not wanting to enter a girl's room, I said that, but Reki had already entered the dark room.

She's exactly like back then...still an enigma to everybody else.

If the door is closed, I won't even be able to say my piece.

So, helplessly, I really had no other choice, I entered Reki's room.

There was only one bare lightbulb inside--

A completely empty room that would shock anyone who came in.

There's no bed, there's no cabinets, there's no TV, there's no computer. There's no carpet or even tatami on the floor. The walls and floor are just

flat, clear cement. All that's here is a feeding bowl for the wolf, set in one corner...

(This room...how is this...)

It's summer, but this room has an inexplicable ability to make people feel cold.

Reki was standing in the kitchen, devoid of refrigerator or cabinets, taking an energy bar out of the bag.

By the wall, there were also several empty boxes of energy bars, all of them the same brand.

Is that all you eat? I can't believe you can survive like this...

"...?"

My mind full of shock, I suddenly noticed that there was another room adjoining this one.

Turning on the light, I could see that inside was a table, and set on it were black tools that looked like anvils.

These...are tools to maintain guns, right?

And, they're set down extremely neatly.

It may be that all Butei take care of their own gun--but that only includes basic maintenance. And for those jobs which requires complete dismantlement and modification, they'll leave it for the professionals. And Butei High's Amdo is the one that accepts these jobs, fixing them for credits, and a price.

But, from this work room, Reki appears to have been completely involved in maintaining her gun. There's even a balance for weighing gunpowder, it looks like even her bullets are made herself.

As expected of the robot Reki. If she does something, she completely immerses herself in it.

Everything was too ordered, and it made me feel like I had stepped into Reki's personal world--so, I felt that this isn't some place that I could linger for a long period of time.

...Let's finish this quickly, and I'll head back.

"Hey, Reki."

"Yes."

"Just now, you were using a scope to watch my room, right?"

"Yes."

...She admitted it so brazenly.

"That's called peeping. I don't know what you saw, but forget it all. Understand?"

"Yes."

Reki, who didn't even say one word of apology, stood with her back against the wall. Thud.

Holding the SVD sniper rifle like a stick...she lowered herself down.

--Is that all you wanted?"

Seeing her skirt, without her knowledge, flip up, revealing her thigh, I looked away.

Reki, are you concealing your inner soul or are you just unguarded...I don't understand you at all.

"Ah...Yes. I'm going back."

"The light in the room over there, please switch it off as well, Kinji-san. Haimaki, come."



Click. Reki sat there, using the barrel of her sniper rifle to flip the switch, plunging the room into darkness.

And walking to her side, the wolf...seemingly called Haimaki...sat down obediently, closing its eyes.

"...Why are you switching off the light."

"I'm going to sleep."

"Sleep? In that position?"

I asked in surprise.

Shi.

Reki, exactly like a robot, closed her eyes, took off her headphones, and nodded.

"Could it be that...you always sleep like this?"

Shi.

...Amazing.

Snipers need discipline. I've heard that they need to be able to tolerate any kind of environment, waiting for their target to enter their sights. But this...it's already far exceeded mere discipline.

She's a warrior who always watches enemies, whether walking or sitting.

"Kinji-san. Could I ask something? I heard that you accepted a commission as a security guard at the casino."

"...Is there something?"

"I want to participate as well."

What?

Why?

"It's not that you don't have enough credits, right?"

Rustle.

Reki's short hair rustled, as she shook her head.

"Then, Why?" I asked.

--I can feel the wind. A hot, dry, inexpressible...evil wind..."

Echoing inside this completely empty room, Reki's transparent voice--

Made me feel as if she had predicted that something bad was going to happen, and I was at a loss of what to say.

Leaving Reki's room and returning to the boy's dormitory, click...I opened the door, and the room that lay before me was...huh?

It's all cleaned up?

I thought that this was an illusion that my heart was showing me, wanting to escape from reality, but it wasn't a mirage. If you'd like to know why, it's because, on the balcony, the M60 that Shirayuki was firing just now was lying there, cooling. And also, to prevent others from noticing, they even covered it with a motorcycle protector.

"..."

The walls and ceiling had within a hour, been beautifully repaired, and even the bunk beds had been replaced, somehow. Any signs of the mad barrage from just now had...disappeared without a trace.

That armed Miko. Her skills in this area are beyond frightening.

Having been designated by Shirayuki as an extreme danger, (not that she isn't,) Aria was gone. She might be wearing that, but I'm afraid that she might not return for the whole night.

--It's OK. Leave Tokyo to Onee-chan."

From the bathroom came Shirayuki's voice.

...It looks like she's talking with her sisters in Hotogi right now. It's pretty obvious from that stern tone of voice.

Shirayuki may look weak, but she's the eldest of 7 sisters.

--The enemy is a Kojyuu user<sup>[4]</sup> from abroad. You have to do your best to protect the Hotogi. Then, that should be all...Yeah. Good night."

Hearing Shirayuki finish her call from the bathroom--

Behind her, I asked her a question.

"...How are your sisters doing?"

"Kyaa!"

Shirayuki, seemingly scared by me, who had appeared out of nowhere, she jumped 30 centimeters off the chair she was sitting on.

I really wanted to ask, how on Earth do you do that Shirayuki hop?

Thinking that in my heart, I picked up the cellphone that Shirayuki had dropped on the floor.

The wallpaper of the white cellphone...I don't know how she took it, but it appears to be a portrait of me...I'll just pretend I never saw it, and forget about it.

"Kin-chan, um, uh, the room...I'm sorry...I'm sorry, I-I-I"

Seeing her clasp her cellphone to her breast, kneeling on the floor, continually apologizing, I couldn't help but sigh.

"Whatever. Everything's fixed, anyways."

I've already given up on her.

"Right, what is 'enemy' supposed to mean? Could it be that the Hotogi shrine is fighting some divine war?"

"Um...That...It's kind of embarrassing to say this...About that, recently, the Irokaneayame appears to have been stolen by somebody."

"Ayame...? Ah, that sword that you always bring around with you. You left it at Hotogi?"

Now that I think about it, she didn't take out her sword and start hacking things to pieces, as usual.

"It's been taken away from me. Because I broke several of the Hotogi's restrictions..."

Shirayuki's face, still had makeup on it this late for whatever reason, and it was twisted into a smile. Now though, it was showing a thoughtful expression.

Afterward, \*rustle\*

From a small pouch, she took out several things and placed them on the shelf of the bathroom.

Pulling out her cosmetics, Shirayuki \*clank\*. And like she was playing ice-hockey, she threw Aria's imported cosmetics on the ground. That's horrible.

"Kin-chan, about that."

Saying that, taking out some Japanese paper and pen from the depths of the pouch, Shirayuki...appeared to be drawing something.

"In the Hotogi, we've noticed an evil insect. It's infiltrated in. It looks like this."

An evil...insect?

I dipped my head, looking at Shirayuki's drawing.

Shirayuki's drawing was of a scarab-like bug...

Ah. Hey. Shirayuki.

Your art skills...are...really amazing.

Being able to illustrate depth and shadow with a pen, it looks just like a monochrome photo.

I really wish that Jeanne, whose skills are like that of a kindergartner, could go and learn from the same place that you did.

"This bug, I think--It's a familiar."

"Umm...What's that? Saying SSR-specific jargon so matter-of-factly, I don't understand it at all."

"Ah, right. In Japan, it would be known as a *Shikigami*."

"...I understand even less, now. Uh, this looks like a scarab to me."

"Yeah. This is a gold bug. It's also known as a dung beetle."

...Which is a scarab.

"Kin-chan, recently...have you seen this kind of bug around you?"

Using her completed drawing to cover the bottom part of her face, she raised it up for me to see.

Looking at this...I started to remember.

"...I've seen it. The night I went to Tanabata with Aria."

Shirayuki's gaze, above the Japanese paper, suddenly became as ferocious and intimidating as a knife edge--I quickly followed up...

"Th-that thing ran into Aria's yukata, I just helped her get it out."

I'm finished.

In my panic, I think I said something that I really shouldn't have...thinking this, looking at Shirayuki, I--

Noticed that those long-eyelashed eyes weren't angry, but filled with an extremely solemn expression.

"Kin-chan, during the summer holidays...you accepted a job as security at the casino, along with Aria, right?"

"Ah, that's right."

...This girl, she really knows every move that I make.

Well, it's there for all to see on the Butei High bulletin board after all, any student can see it.

--I'm joining too,"

said Shirayuki, filled with determination, folding the picture of the bug and keeping it.

Shouldn't it be "Can I join too?"? Why is it "I'm joining too"?

This is a resolve that I've rarely seen in Shirayuki.

"..Why? You don't need credits."

"Ah..yeah. But, um, don't you need four people?...you haven't gathered enough yet, right? Th-this is for your credits, Kin-chan. He, he, oh!"

Seeming as if she was hiding something...Shirayuki closed her fist and raised it in the air.

Really, this honor student. Once you start talking about grades and credits, she's full of energy.

However, it's true that I didn't have enough people. Muto and Shiranui are still working, and also, the notice on the emergency missions board did say that "Girls are preferred."

"Then...Shirayuki, you can be support and communications. This may be called security, but we're basically acting as bodyguards for the entire casino. Also, you're not really suited to being a front."

Weirdly enough, each one asked to join in on this mission...but with this, four people are gathered. The prerequisites of this job have been fulfilled.

However, we have Aria who shoots before she thinks. Robot Reki, who is always thinking about God knows what. Armed Miko Shirayuki. Also, I, an E rank Butei. Is this our 4-man squadron?

This time...I have a bad feeling about the future again.

## 4th Ammo: Infighting -Falling out-

---

July 24th, in the afternoon. I arrived at Odaiba.

In order to make up for the credits that I was missing, I became security for the casino here.

The world celebrated summer holidays had arrived. However, as Jeanne so happily pointed out, I had a problem, and so I needed to do this kind of mission, which would probably be like tuition in another school. Which horrible path of life did I take? I might say this, but I knew. The path being, Aria.

Well, no matter how much I complain, nothing's going to change.

Dressed up as a young IT CEO, I straightened my flashy tie...and stepped onto the escalator going through Aqua City Odaiba, entering Tokyo's casino 'Odaiba Golden Pyramidion'

Gambling has been legal in Japan for two years already. And the first casino to be built upon legalization was this one, 'Odaiba Golden Pyramidion'. Its name completely corresponded with how it looked, a gigantic golden pyramid-shaped casino, structured by a steel frame and glass, extremely glaring beneath the bright summer sun.

From the information that I read...there was a news report on this place a few years before, where according to the governor, who was interviewed, this design was inspired by "A design brought over to Japan from some other country, a colossal golden pyramidion."

--Entering the air-conditioned building through the automatic doors, I arrived at an entrance lobby with a laser fountain inside. Moving forward, through this area...I reached the casino hall.

"I'd like some gambling chips. Today, a blue canary flew in the window<sup>[5]</sup>; I'll definitely be lucky." Reciting the code at the counter, and trading 1 million counterfeit yen for some colorful chips, I...may be acting, but I strode into the casino with a little bit of pride.

In the vicinity of the entrance to the casino, there were some slot machines, for those who wanted some cheap fun. Tourists and youngsters alike, as if playing slots on the side of the street, were excitedly watching the 7s flash by.

It looks like this floor had a seaside casino theme, and surrounding the whole hall--were waves, set up beforehand.

That pool that looked like a road of water wasn't for swimming, but for the bunny girl waitresses, allowing them to move around with great speed using the jet skis above the water.

"What would you like to drink?" "Whether it be cocktails, liquor, or coffee, it's all free." "If there's anything you want, please call one of the waitresses that are close by~"

Looking on from afar...that work method, just like a [water strider](#), is really interesting

While I was staring at them--

Chi!

Suddenly, my ear was seized from below by someone.

"Stop drooling, you pervert!!"

A seiyuu-like voice suddenly exploded outwards, next to my ear. It assaulted my eardrum with as much power as the attack when we were fighting Vlad last month, "Wallachia's Magic Flute."

Not able to do anything except clasp my ear, I looked down...

Her pink twin-tails and her bunny ears were standing straight up with anger, her hands on her hips.

--Hey Aria. I'm a customer, you know. You can't treat me like this."

I whispered to Aria, who was extremely upset for some reason.

Hearing my words, Aria "Hmphed" and she twisted her head around.

What. Was I the one who messed with you?

"Hey...are you doing your job as a waitress? I can't relax at all..."

"Of course I am. However, for some reason, nobody's ordering anything from me."

Pursing her lips, Aria bitterly looked around at all the men in the hall.

So that's how it is. Is that why you're unhappy?

Well...that's to be expected.

I looked at the tiny bunny girl Aria, standing in front of me, and my spirits lifted a little.

A few days ago, when we were trying these outfits out, I had thought that this bunny girl suit was designed for well-endowed women. Letting a high school student, no, letting Aria, whose height is that of a elementary school student, wear it is futile. She won't be popular at all. No matter how much padding you use to make up for it, it won't work.

However, if I dare to say that, I'll definitely be slaughtered by her bullets. With the thought of continuing my family name in mind, I changed the subject.

"...Anyways, why aren't you driving those?"

I stuck my chin out pointing towards the jet skis, and Aria, her eyes turning around, glaring at me--

"Shut up!"

Pa!

Chi!

-jumped into the air, stabbing those pointy rabbit ears directly into my eyes. These eyes are way harder than I thought!

"Uwaah!"

"You know that I can't swim! If you say anything else that's stupid, I'll play hole roulette with you! Understand!?"

Ho-how can she be this vicious! Aren't rabbits supposed to be gentle animals?

Having had my eyes destroyed by a mad rabbit's ears, I hurriedly moved to my security position in the inner part of the casino, as if running away.

These spacious rooms are the high-stake card-games and roulette tables with, where the customers change into professional gamblers.

Men wearing neat suits. Beautiful women wearing evening dresses. The intelligent types, bringing their laptops, their glasses flashing. And at first

glance, tourists, but the expression in their eyes could not be said to be normal.

--I have to stay on high alert in this place. Thinking about whether or not any incidents were going to happen, I...standing next to the accessorized sports cars, carefully observed the jazz band on the stage, under the chandeliers. And...

Chatter...Chatter...

It looks like...there's already something going on.

In one corner of the hall, there was an abnormally large group of people clustered together.

(What happened...?)

Continuing to pretend to be a customer, I approached the crowd.

"Su-such a shy girl...she's too cute..." "It was so worth it to come here, even though I lost so much cash before I noticed her." "Ah, don't cover your breasts! Look this way!"

The men were shouting these kinds of catcalls.

They were even using their phones to take photos.

Did an idol come to the casino?

"Pl-please don't take photos of the waitresses!" "The notices on the entrance have already said that!"

Rescued by the other bunny girls, one of the bunny girls was desperately tugging on her ears, covering her face, and running away.

Hey...

Isn't that Shirayuki?

...How did something like this happen?

Half-crying, Shirayuki noticed that my face was twitching uncontrollably, and she rushed into the staff room, running away from the men, whose eyes were close to becoming heart shaped.

In order to avoid the suspicion of other customers, I idled outside the room for a while before entering the lounge. Shirayuki was the only one inside, sitting on a high-chair, catching her breath.

She was wearing a black swimsuit as well as high-fishnet stockings as part of her bunny girl outfit. Her rabbit ears...were taken off.

"Shirayuki. Didn't you say that you should stay in the shadows while working, not attracting attention?"

Hearing my voice, and going "Ah!" while raising her head, Shirayuki--

"Ki-Kin-chan...! I'm sorry! I'm sorry I'm sorry!"

-suddenly started apologizing to me, and she put her bunny ears back on her head, in a panic.

And she pulled them forward once again, obscuring her face.

Um...If you just wanted to cover your face...was there really a need to wear the rabbit ears again?

"Be-because Kin-chan...Kin-chan seemed to very happy when you saw Aria in this outfit, s-so I thought, does Kin-chan like this..."

Shirayuki's moist, black eyes looked at me surreptitiously through the gap between the bunny ears.

"That...we only wore that to test them for the upcoming job. This is so annoying, at that time, I--"

Hey, did I really look happy while being stepped on by high-heeled shoes?

Shirayuki's reality filter is amazingly terrifying!

"Um, if you expose that you're undercover, then our security job will be counted as failed. You should have known this as well. While there might be purposeful exposure in order to guard against the offender's actions, but the wishes of our client this time are very specific. We are supposed to move quietly, undercover, not disturbing the customer's pleasure. So why did you let so many people gather around?"

"...Th-that...I don't know either..."

Shirayuki, finally letting go of the bunny ears, looked at me with those eyes, under her smooth fringe.

And the forefingers of both hands were tapping at her face incessantly...

"We-wearing these clothes is really embarrassing...I wanted to carry out my work inconspicuously, but at some point in time, without me noticing...men had started gathering all around me..."

Ah...so that's how it is.

Looking at Shirayuki right now, I think I know the reason already.



Her knees twisting without pause, trying to hide her thighs, which were extremely visible through her fishnet stockings, Shirayuki's appearance nearly made me, somebody who hates being around girls, think that she was irresistible.

Shirayuki already had a figure that could rival that of idols, and now she was wearing something that revealed her snow-white skin. Only able to cover the area below her enormous breasts, she was wearing a very risque swimsuit.

Added to this, Shirayuki is extremely shy towards everybody, especially men, with me being the only exception. That kind of embarrassed attitude appears to have an unmatched appeal for one part of the male personality, making her extremely hard to resist. However, all it did was make me a little nervous.

This, combined with other factors...

Made the situation in the hall devolve to one akin to throwing a rabbit into a wolves' den.

"...All of that was because of your outfit. You're way more developed than Aria or Riko, so don't wear these kinds of risque clothes that excite men so well."

Sounding like her father, I made my conclusion.

"Ex-exciting...men...? Me....Me....?"

This ultra-secluded Miko, who had pretty much never left her shrine or school, blushed heavily.

Afterwards, \*shi\*...her shoulders retracted, seemingly conveying the message, "I'm extremely sorry for being born into this world". However, not a few seconds later, she seemed to have thought of something, and her face took on a "!" expression.

What is it...These series of movements just serves to make me feel that something ominous is going to happen...

"Men...Ki...Ki-Kin-chan is...is also a man. Right...?"

As if gathering up her courage, Shirayuki's--\*shi\*

-shoes hit the floor, making a tapping noise, and she stood up, holding one hand as if trying to cover her hips.

Afterward, \*ShiShi\*. She smoothed her fishnet stockings, embarrassed.

"...Th-then, th-these clothes...Wh-what do you think, Kin-chan...?"

Ah..."What do you think"?

Shirayuki, \*shi\*, twisted her knees inwards, watching my expression intently.

"I-if Kin-chan likes these kinds of clothes...th-then even if I'm wearing th-these clothes...e-even after this job is ov-over...what we agreed on..."

Shirayuki seemed to be playing out a scenario in her head, her hands grasping her blushing cheeks, screwing her eyes up.

"Before, in the ambulace room, the co-co-con-cont..."

From between the rabbit ears, as if matching up with her words, \*fuuu, fuuu\* hot air started to rise.

"What's wrong? Calm down, Shirayuki. Once you lose control, fire will start coming out."

"cont, co-con...con...tinu...ation! It's fine if we do it with a bunny suit...!"

For the sake of returning Shirayuki, who for some reason couldn't even say the single word "continuation" properly, back to normal--

"Hey, Shirayuki. What are you thinking about, all by yourself?"

I grabbed her shoulders, rocking her back and forth.

"Ri-right now? If you want to do it now, that's fine too! Bu-but, the lo-lock!"

Shirayuki, whose eyes seemed to be spinning, went into her overload sequence, just like before.

Can somebody tell me what turned her into this state?

"I-ha-ha-ha-ha-have to lock it!"

"Hey, go back to normal, got it?"

\*shake shake\* I put more power into my shaking.

"Ah, ah, ahhh."

I don't know how, but Shirayuki, seemingly up in the clouds right now, made an impossible, strange noise--Thump.

Her long, black hair shook, and she suddenly fell down, like a puppet whose strings have been cut.

This...is a new mode. Self-destruct, maybe? I have no way of understanding.

"Are...are you alright...?"

Looks like...I shouldn't need to worry.

She had a rapturous expression while fainting, almost as if she had ascended to heaven.

I don't know, nor do I wish to know what kind of happy events took place in Shirayuki's mind, but it's probably some fantasy which had content so strong that it exceeded the limits of her body.

For humans, the impossible is forbidden, after all.

Both Shirayuki and Aria couldn't be undercover guards if their lives depended on it.

But, we can't get fired because of this. For the sake of moving up a grade, even if it's by myself, I have to finish this commission. Thinking that way, I went to the 2nd floor of the casino--the floor for premium roulette tables.

On this special floor, the lowest wager is 1 million yen.

Only the wealthy members of this casino can gamble here. Even spectating requires a fee.

So, there shouldn't be many customers...was what I thought, but there was a crowd of spectators in one corner of the 2nd floor.

It looks like there's a fight taking place.

I used the employee keycard that I received along with these 'young IT CEO' clothes and entered the floor, looking towards the corner that was luxuriously decorated with animal specimens.

There was a colossal roulette table there, and wearing a vest with a gold buckle, the small dealer was--

"..."

Reki.

With a \*dong\*, Reki struck the bell that signaled the start of the match, and she looked at the table, as expressionless as always.

Aria and Shirayuki were suffering from their bunny suits, but she was the only one who was wearing pants.

Reki...could it be that you are the one I can rely upon?

"Then, may the players please place their bets."

The crowd around applauded Reki, who said that smoothly.

The rules in different casinos are slightly different, but in roulette, the players first place their bets, and then the dealer throws a small ball into the rolling roulette wheel. That's the order of events.

"Ha, haha...such a strong...yet pitiful dealer I have never met before. I really did not expect that she'd be able to make me lose 35 million within 1 hour."

Saying that, one of the customers sitting by the side of the table, seemed to be extremely excited, even though he was the only one gambling.

"Could it be that you're the Goddess of luck?"

Goddess?

More like an assassin.

Keeping that to myself, I...suddenly noticed that I already had an impression of this man in my mind.

I've seen him on TV. I remember, he was nicknamed the Japanese Bill Gates, an actual young IT CEO. There's also a lot of rumours about his relationships with crowds and crowds of idols.

The people around rushed here to see this fabulously wealthy person?

"...The chips I have left are equivalent in value to what I've lost, which is 35 million. I'm putting it all on black!"

In the wake of the young CEO's extremely enthusiastic and excited voice and movements, \*clack!\* the tokens in question were pushed into the box designated 'black'--This guy is obviously excited because he's on a losing-streak.

This means that all 35 of his 1 million tokens have been laid down, making the other customers cheer in excitement, but this...gives me a feeling of contradiction.

"Black'? Then, if this ball lands in the black, your money will be doubled. OK?"

Reki, holding up the game ball, which looked like a white ping pong ball, kept her tone soft, her expression unchanging.

"OK. But what I want isn't tokens. If I win--I want you."

Hearing the young CEO say this, the surrounding guests raised an uproar.

"If I'm able to acquire lucky girl, I myself will become more lucky."

What the hell are you saying.

Bloody lolicon.

Anyways...I may not know how much you want Reki, but she's definitely not worth 35 million.

"..."

And Reki stayed silent.

The Reki as usual.

But, this isn't good. Not even giving off a friendly smile, she's making the surrounding guests think that she's angry at the young CEO's words.

This atmosphere is exactly like one right before a 1 on 1 duel.

With this, it doesn't matter whether the young CEO wins or Reki wins, there'll be problems either way.

Aria. Shirayuki. Reki. Can't you do your job properly?

...There's nothing for it. Time for me to act. This is for my credits.

"I'm sorry. I'd like to join the fun."

I raised my hands, and--sat next to the table as well.

The rules say that, as long as the dealer hasn't declared the betting as over, anyone can join, without exception.

The young CEO's eyes stared at me from under his gelled hair.

"Who are you, do you want the dealer for yourself?"

"I'm the boss of your competing company you know? I want to say that...but I only have this much cash on hand, a negligible amount. Hehe, I'm just trying to gamble."

Shrugging my shoulders, I took out one 1 million token, giving off the feeling of a CEO of a small company.

An atmosphere that said "some small-fry just appeared" appeared among the crowd...and slowly, they calmed down.

But, that's good.

That CEO is already overexcited. If he loses, he may start causing trouble because of his hurt pride.

So, in order to prevent that, I have to lose together with him.

But, if this CEO wins...Whatever. Reki, you'll have to find a way out of that one yourself.

"Place your bet, you brat. I won't give her to you."

I'm completely fine with that.

I want to bet on...that's right. Losing by betting on black would be too obvious. So, my color will be 'red'--the number is irrelevant. I carelessly put my tokens onto 23, my class number.

The chance of me winning is 1/36. There's no way I can win.

"...Then, the betting is over."

Reki looked at the table, and her normally expressionless face had a hint of anger in it, and she announced the end of betting.

Afterwards, she spun the roulette, and as for the ball...\*pa\*

Without hesitation, just like a robot, she threw the ball into the roulette.

The ball followed the rotating of the roulette, moving--

\*Roll Roll Roll Roll\*

It's starting to jump up and down over the numbers.

Thunk. The CEO who had bet that enormous sum of money, 35 million, couldn't help but swallow, leaning over the table.

I also pretended to be nervous.

\*Click, Click...Click Click\*.

Click.

--Red 23. Player #2 wins."

Hearing Reki's announcement--

The entire crowd cheered, everybody shouting "WOOOOAAAAHHHH!" at the same time. And the CEO...\*Thump\*, he slumped over the table, having lost everything. "...!"

Reki gathered the tokens that the CEO had put down, as well as the ones that I had put down, and pushed the chips, which added up to 36 million, using the T-shaped bar in front me, whose face was twitching uncontrollably.

"Here you are. 36x your wager."

Hey...could you pay more attention to the atmosphere, Reki...

Just now, you definitely made me win on purpose!

Nobody can control the position in which the ball will go. That's the entire basis of this game...but faced with Reki, such things are useless.

I gambled with the purpose of calming down the heated situation in the forefront of my mind, but this turn of events has made them get even more excited.

"Hahaha...I lost 70 million, didn't I? As I expected, I can't just let it go. But, I've already lost so much money. So my pitiful dealer-san . At least, your phone number...could you tell me it?"

Raising his head and saying that, the CEO appears to be someone who can't even fall down without getting something out of it.

That's probably why he got to be a CEO.

"Please behave yourself. It would be better if you returned today."

"No, you have to tell me...otherwise, your e-mail is fine too."

"All those that are gathered here, please disperse."

Ignoring the struggling young CEO and the guests milling around, Reki--

"There's an ill wind blowing."

turned her head towards me, saying that.

An ill wind...

"At least tell me your name!"

As the CEO continued to harass her, \*Bang!\*

From behind Reki, within the animal specimens--

A silver wolf rushed out like a hurricane.

--!?"

That's Haimaki, the wolf that Reki is raising. So it was crouching over there.

The silver wolf used the roulette table as a step, and bounded over to the panicking crowd in an instant.

Every token, worth about a million, came down in a shower on the head of the CEO, who had fallen onto the floor, sitting on his ass.

At the same time that I turned my head that direction, Haimaki--Thud! -smashed into, coming from the corner of the room, a person--?

"!"

What...is that...!?

That was an abnormal, indescribable man.

His skin looked like it had been painted black, naked except for a tea-colored cloth around his waist.

But even more strange than that, was his head.

That head, wasn't human.

That...appeared during the animal show that Aria likes to watch, a jackal-like canine head.

The head was a jackal, and the body--that guy, was using this kind of body.

My senses were screaming at me, telling me that this was definitely not some sort of masquerade, some sort of make up to go to a social gathering. The movement of that slit of a mouth, was far too natural.

Most importantly--in his hand, he was holding a half-moon shaped axe!

A robber come for money...that's not it. Is he trying to kill everybody here?

Taking Haimaki's charge attack, the Jackal, \*Rip!\*

-split the tiger machine by the wall, into two halves.

Coins rained down everywhere and the machine, current leaking out, flashed with sparks.

"This...What kind of special event is this!"

Shouted the young CEO...

"I really wish that this was an event too."

Seeing me remove my tie and draw my gun, he ran away, too scared to make a sound.

Following his panicked scramble to the other customers, who were escaping outside, \*Shi\*

The Jackal, his head still in Haimaki's jaws, stood up.

I...I can't believe it.

Having fought with him once before, I knew full well. Haimaki's weight is comparable to that of a motorcycle.

Even harder to believe was, that guy, with just a wave of his neck, flung Haimaki loose.

And--Haimaki, trying to stand up, was already nearly unconscious--those red eyes, and shining axe-edge, turned to face me.

Which means...his target is us?

"Be careful Kinji-san. That isn't a human."

While I chuckled and said to Reki, "I noticed."--

One bunny girl, going against the flow of escaping people, charged down from the stairs.

"...Mushihitogata<sup>[6]</sup> ...!"

Both her eyes widened, calling the Jackal in front of me by that name was--Shirayuki.

"Kin-chan, run away--if you're touched by him, you'll receive his curse!"

Shouting out some SSR terminology, Shirayuki reached her hand to her back, looking as if she was going to draw her blade...but on that back, the normally ever-present Irokaneayame was missing.

That blade was withheld by Shirayuki's clan, and afterwards, it was stolen by somebody.

Frowning for a moment, Shirayuki immediately stuck her hand below her bunny girl suit's tail, fishing out several pieces of paper, no, they're amulets.

"Gohou no Hihomurafuda<sup>[7]</sup>--"

Reciting something, Shirayuki scattered the talismans into the air--

\*Fwahh, Fwaah\*. The talismans floated in the air in front of Shirayuki, then burst into flame.

"Kin-chan, get down!"

\*Pa!\* Screaming that out, Shirayuki brought her hands together.

With the echoes of her cry still lingering in the air, the five talismans turned into a fireball, and shot towards the Jackal, just like a flare.

The Jackal had just turned his head when--the fireball, as if avoiding his gaze, split in 5 different directions, forming an arc, not allowing the enemy a chance to escape...

\*Pa Pa Pa Pa Pa!\*

Like a flamethrower, flame enveloped that--

"Uu...!"

The room became stained with orange light in an instant, and I threw myself down...

--It won't work. It should be fire-resistant."

Reki, her short hair fluttering from the wave of hot air, took out the sniper rifle she had hidden underneath the table.

As Reki said...

The Jackal, releasing clouds of white smoke, strode towards Shirayuki, not having taken any damage at all.

I'm hardly adept when it comes to the SSR, but I've heard Aria say that all abilities have an extremely complex 'attributes'. These attributes are split into 4~5 in games, but in a similar system, the powers that ability users use are split up into 70-80 attributes, and they serve to balance each other out through mutual weaknesses and strengths.

These 'attributes', having been researched thoroughly, can be summarized in one sentence. It's like playing rock-paper-scissors. Specific attributes are weak against other specific attributes. Conversely, specific attributes are able to withstand the attacks of other specific attributes. What happened just now was an example of this, the fire having no effect at all.

This information...Shirayuki should have known this.

"Come at me, puppet! I won't even let you touch Kin-chan!"

Her eyebrows shooting up, high heels thudding into the ground with a \*Da\*, and adopting a stance, holding her hands open, Shirayuki...even understanding the ineffectiveness of her own ability, still wanted to fight the enemy one-on-one.

"..."

Reki raised her SVD--but she was unable to fire.

And having already drawn my gun, I also realized that it would be extremely difficult to cover Shirayuki.

The Jackal was standing between Shirayuki and us. If our bullets pierced him or miss him, there's a high chance that we will hurt Shirayuki. But the Shirayuki as of now appeared to be too angry to notice this.

Shirayuki--once you feel that I'm in danger, do you go berserk like this!?

"--Hah--!"

Dodging past the Jackal's axe, Shirayuki's two fists thundered towards the enemy's eyes--\*Click!\*

-The Jackal dodged with the speed of a boxer, following up with a fist sent at Shirayuki's jaw.

"--!"

Shirayuki's legs, going into in an X-shape, were flung outwards...and she flew backwards, straight into the wall.

\*Rumble\* Under the crooked rabbit ears, seeming to look this way, her head had drooped forwards.

From the looks of it, she has a concussion. There's no way she can recover immediately.

"Shirayuki!"

I straightened my gun, thinking of charging in and engaging the Jackal, who was in the midst of sending her to heaven, in an Aru=Kata gunfight.

But, Reki tugged on my sleeve--

\*whoosh\*. Flying up onto the table, kneeling down on one knee, Reki--

"Kinji-san, lend me your shoulder."

\*Pa!\*

Using my shoulder as support, she pulled the trigger of the SVD.

\*Bang!\* The bullet pierced the Jackal's shoulder--close to the collarbone, leaving a bullet hole in one of the walls of the hall.

Just now, when Shirayuki drooped her head, a safe line of fire was created.

\*HOWL!\*

Finally returning from its dazed state, the silver wolf immediately used its razor-sharp teeth to bite down upon the body of the Jackal, which had been distorted by the impact of the bullet.

\*HOWL! HOWL!\* Having his neck and other areas continuously being ripped open, the Jackal--\*Thud\*

-lost power in his limbs...\*Shi\*

And as if melting, he became like black sand--that looked like iron ore.

And I, along with Haimaki, who was standing dazed atop the pile of sand, couldn't believe my eyes.

(Wha...What the hell is going on...!)

Still ringing from the thunder of the gunshot from just now, my ears...suddenly heard the noise of an insect.

"...?"

From within the sand--at that moment, a black scarab flew out.

I don't know what happened. I don't understand the situation at all.

But, that can be thought about later. Right now we have to take care of Shirayuki--

"Kinji-san, you can't go, that bug is very dangerous."

"Dangerous? Who cares about some insect. Right now, the most important thing is Shirayuki...!"

But, Reki's hands grasped my sleeve with all her strength.

Let go! Let go of me!

What the hell are you doing...!

That black scarab, as if trying to escape from Reki's gaze...flew out the window.

"Kinji-san."

Toneless--yet, full of anxiety, Reki's voice couldn't help but make me turn my head around.

Only to see Reki, \*Click\*

Attaching a 20-centimeter blade...below the barrel of the gun.

That's something like a tactical knife, a bayonet.

The SVD sniper rifle is of Russian make, a modification using an assault rifle as its basis. In close quarters a bayonet can be attached, giving it the ability to be used in melee.

"First, we're going to thin out the enemy in melee, let's change our location. This isn't a good place for sniping."

"Thin out...the enemy?"

Just now, you and the wolf, didn't you already vanquish the enemy?

"I only have 4 bullets left. There are more enemies than I have bullets."

Following Reki's gaze, I looked upwards--

"...!!"

Finally understanding the meaning of her words, my back stiffened.

That abnormal scene rendered me unable to move, as if I had been frozen.

On the other side of the exquisite chandelier, on the ceiling of the hall, several things, looking much like the Jackal of just now, were crawling there.

In total, there were about 10.

I...I looked back, looking at the bayonet-wielding Reki, still disguised as a dealer.

Before, back in Assault, I had carried out several missions with Reki.

But, I've never seen her get caught up in melee.

Because snipers by definition, don't like to be in close combat. They are masters of a completely different skillset than us, the Butei in Assault. They are specialists in long-range attacks.

Reki's slender arms being able to melee with those monsters--I could not imagine it.

(Shirayuki...!)

I have to quickly save the still unconscious Shirayuki.

But--how do I get through those monsters?

Those things, their eyes shining with red light, were staring towards us.

Not caring about Shirayuki, they...are probably waiting for Reki and I to save her, before launching a concerted attack. It looks like the intelligence of these things aren't as low as that of the Jackal from just now.

What do I do...What on Earth do I do.

I don't know...I don't know, the me as of now, doesn't know...!

---\*Bang Bang Bang Bang!\*

The sound of Colt M1911 Akimbo's continuous gunshots rang out!

The bullets, speeding across the room like a razor--\*Thud! Thud!\*

Two or three of the enemies dropped down from the ceiling.

"Haa. These things again?"

Saying those shocking words, that seiyuu-like voice belonged to...the small bunny girl...

Aria!

Appearing in the hall, Aria let loose a barrage of .45ACP bullets towards the enemies beside her, her pink twin-tails dancing in the wake of her movements.

Looking at Aria, her movements look as natural as a housekeeper's movements while cleaning with a broom.

She...has already gotten used to fighting with these monsters...

"Hey, Idiot Kinji, stop daydreaming!"

\*Howl!\* Aria bared her canines, the intensity of the action not losing to that of the Jackals, and she raised her hands far up, continually assaulting the enemies on the roof, all the while striding towards the center of the hall.

The Jackals, just like cockroaches, scuttled all around the roof, escaping from Aria, with a \*Chi Chi\* noise.

...Hey, isn't the position of the bunny and jackals the wrong way around?

"In these situations, you shouldn't wait for the enemy to act. You have to take action first!!"

\*Bang! Bang!\* Jumping around, using stools and tables as stepping-stones, Aria grabbed hold of the huge chandelier hanging down from the ceiling.

And, \*shi, shi\*, she clambered up its body.

"Reki!"

\*Clank! Whoosh!\*

Hearing Aria's call, the bullet that Reki fired grazed the metal chain of the chandelier.

Under this impact, the chandelier, with Aria on it, \*Rumble\*, started spinning around like a merry-go-round.

\*Bang! Bang Bang Bang!\*

Turning into a rotating emplacement, Aria fired and fired, continuing to attack the jackals on the roof without pause.

\*Crash. Bang.\*

Around me--bullet casings, stray bullets, splinters from the wall, and even bits of pieces of the jackals rained down.

"Ah, hey, Aria!"

Aria, you...ho-how can you be so direct, so unscrupulous.

Isn't this completely ignoring our distress, and just firing at every enemy you see!

\*Bang!\*

I looked towards the new gunshots, and noticed that Reki, who had rushed to Shirayuki's side at some point in time, was opening fire with the bayonet-attached SVD.

Those jackals that stood up after being blown off the roof by Aria, were promptly dispatched by her.

Seeing one of the jackals that fell down beside me about to stand up, I also--

Thud!

-able to do nothing else, I restricted his movement, piercing his thigh with a shot from my Beretta.

\*Thud\*. The jackals that fell down, as well as the ones that were destroyed by Aria all did the same thing...they dissolved into iron ore...and a scarab flew out of each pile of it.

I walked towards the center of the hall, staying alert of my surroundings, there were only two jackals left.

And both of them had fallen on the ground.

\*Clank!\*

Reki broke the iron chain holding the chandelier...\*Crash!\*

Falling down, bringing Aria along with it, the chandelier flattened one. Now, only one is left.

Having been surrounded by the three of us, the last one--

"Uwoohh--!"

-let loose a flute-like, piercing howl, and smashed through the glass, escaping.

Aria, sitting atop the chandelier, which looked like a giant cake, stood up with a \*whoosh\*--

"Really. I expended so much effort to let the customers escape, now that the golem has escaped--there might be trouble."

\*Click Click\*

She said, taking out spare magazines from God knows where, and slotted them inside the black and white M1911s.

"Golem...? Are you talking about these sand people? Just now, Shirayuki called them Mushihitogata--"

"Are you battling without knowing anything? Idiot! Just go back to elementary school!"

Even if I go back, they won't teach me about monsters like these, right?

"In Japan they're called dolls, Shikigami, clay dolls, and puppets. In the west, they're called golems, demons. In short, they're dolls made out of plants, paper, or clay through the use of abilities."

\*Twirl Twirl Twirl\* As if trying to release an electronic signal, Aria kept on spinning her hand around her head.

Hearing her words, my terror at seeing these monsters decreased. Especially because of her matter-of-fact tone.

"Which means that, they're monsters that are controlled by an ability user?"

"That's right. Ooh, you're pretty calm, Kinji."

"...I'm just used to it. It's such a shame."

"Then--"

Looking at Aria's smile,

--let's have some fun."

With no other options, I did as she said. \*Click\*.

I loaded my Beretta, and prepared for pursuit.

Leaving Shirayuki for Reki to handle, I leaned out the window, looking for any hint of the enemy. Sliding down the slope on the pyramid, the jackal...

...was escaping by running on water.

This too!? Well, pleading for normality from a servant of an ability user is probably futile.

How should I chase it...I thought for a second. The answer was on the first floor, one floor below.

The things that the bunny girls were using as they were running away, the jet skis.

According to the schematics of the casino that we had acquired beforehand, the pool running through the first floor led into the sea. I'll use that to chase him there.

Last month, I had a vehicle pursuit with Reki, chasing that wolf. When there are two people riding, the driver sits in front, and the assaulter sits in the back. Judging from that, I should be the driver, and Aria the assaulter.

Thinking this way, I got on one of the jet skis floating by the side of the pool.

"Let's go. Aria, get on."

I said to Aria, who was following behind me.

"Are....are there no life vests? There should at least be a life ring, as well as floats for my arms..."

But, Aria was extremely unwilling to mount the jet ski.

Frowning, I--looked at Aria who was looking at the water, extremely tense, before I suddenly remembered.

That's right, this girl doesn't know how to swim.

But, to drive this vehicle, I need two hands. No matter what, I need an assaulter.

Then, should Reki and her switch positions? No, that won't work. Reki said she was out of bullets.

"Then you sit in front, I'll be in the back!"

Agitated, I sat in the back, and pulled Aria onto the jet ski.

"Uwah!"

Crying out like a kid, Aria--

-had already stepped onto the footrests of the floating jet ski, but with a slip, having stumbled over some component, she made the jet ski tilt dangerously.

"Wh-what are you doing!"

I quickly wrapped my arms around Aria's slender waist, supporting her, before I pulled her up.

\*Splash!\* Slumped over the driver's seat, Aria--

"Uwaaahhhh!"

-crying out, she used her bare arms to embrace me tightly.

"Hey...are you that scared!?"

Hey, sit the other way. If you aren't holding the controls, who's going to drive this.

"Ki-Kinji!"

Aria hugged me with all her strength, even her legs were wrapped around my body.

\*Shi Shi Shi\* She's almost exactly like a koala.

"Ah, hey!"

I wanted to push her off, but even Aria's head was stuck to my face.

Uuu. Aah, this pink hair still has that nice, sweet smell.

I pulled my head away from that hair and looked at Aria's face--

The Aria as of now, was shaking, almost exactly like a frightened rabbit. her eyelids were trembling uncontrollably.

"Ki-Kinji, I can't, I can't. I-I..."

Extremely agitated, she, her eyes full of tears, looked up at me. This, as well as that face, as cute as a doll's--made my heart skip a beat.

Aria...!

Even you, who's been titled with Quadra can cry. You're actually, actually...actually making these cute noises--

You're actually showing me such a cute expression!

(Uu...!)

Looking at her, wearing a swimsuit while clinging on to me, and finally realizing that the ferocious and fearless Aria from earlier had, in an instant, become just like a rabbit, so cute and lovable, I--

-Again, I changed.

I entered Hysteria Mode.

It was extremely fast this time as well. I don't know why, but if it's Aria...all my blood rushes to my core in a heartbeat. It doesn't give me even the slightest chance to resist going into Hysteria Mode.

Why might that be so?

"Aria."

To Aria's ear, which happened to be right next to my mouth, I used a deep, gentle voice--to whisper to her.

Uuu. Are you kidding me, me?

"Let's make a bet."

While whispering soft words into her ear, I glanced at the watch and speedometer mounted on the jet ski.

This can go really fast. Calculating the time that it would take to get the jackal in range...I noticed that although I was extremely agitated earlier, we still had a wealth of time.

"A-a bet...?"

Her hands still shivering, tightly gripping on to me, Aria asked.

That's right, Aria.

Think of something else, forget your fear.

"Right now it's 5:57. If we can finish hunting the jackal within 3 minutes, which means before 6:00, I'll give myself to you."

"Wh-wh-wha-what do you mean?"

"And opposed to that...if we don't manage to hunt him down, then Aria, will be mine."

I clearly said, stressing every syllable--

-Aria's camellia eyes widened into huge circles.

"Wh-wh-why're you saying these kinds of things again! Ah...ah, huh? Those conditions, whether you win or lose, aren't they both favorable for you!?"

I don't really know how to explain, but Aria's pale face from just a moment ago slowly became flushed with blood.

And also, her eyes seemed a little redder.

"Favorable' for me? How? How could that be? Could you explain?"

With every sentence, I drew closer to Aria's face, stressing my syllables even more.

Aria, seeing me get closer and closer, went into a state of panic, whimpering "U-uu"

She seemed as if she wanted to say something, but she couldn't get the words out.

"Fuh... I'm joking. Aria is always so fun to tease."

Seeing me start chuckling, Aria started opening and closing her mouth...

\*Chiiii!\* Her eyebrows tensed up, she pounded a fist towards my temple with a \*Bang!\*

\*Pa\*

This fist, from point-blank range, without the weight of her body behind it, was easily caught by the me in Hysteria Mode.

"Isn't this a good method of attack? See...you've already calmed down."

And with my other hand, I gently prised Aria's legs, which were wearing fishnet stockings, off my back--\*Spin\*

As if dancing, I twirled her body in a semi-circle, making her face forward.

And from behind, I took hold of her hands gently, placing them on the handles.

"Don't be scared. Don't be scared. I am by your side. So--there's no need to be afraid. Right?"

From the backseat, as if I was a puppeteer controlling a doll, I guided Aria's movements--and as if using suggestion, I put my head next to her ear, constantly repeating my words.

Having already blushed all the way to her ears, Aria...

Lowered her head, as if trying to use her hair to cover her eyes...

\*Whoosh\*

And as if trying to be brief, she nodded her head without saying a word.

"Aria. Battling is like gambling. Those jackals that turned themselves into tokens and challenged us, failed. But now, they don't want to pay up, and they're running away."

I squeezed Aria's hands from behind, pushing the ignition of the jet ski.

\*Rumble\*...following the noise of ignition, the engine started.

"So now, let's collect the debt. I'm not so kind as to sympathize with those that lose to me. Of course, this also applies to the wager concerning 'until 6 o'clock'...If Aria loses, I won't show any mercy."

I cruelly ignored Aria, who was saying, "Uh-u-um, di-didn't you say that you were joking?"

"Let's go, Aria. The roulette has been turned, it's time to throw the ball in."

"...They...They're both the same."

Finally raising her head, Aria spoke angrily, staring towards the sea.

"Both the same?"

"The Kinji right now! The Kinji just now! Both are Idiot Kinji!"

And with that, Aria floored the accelerator.

Suddenly, we were flung forward at great speed.

Racing through the small stretch of water inside the pyramid, the jet ski sped out to sea.

Its axe discarded, running all fours like an animal, the jackal...was faster than running on two legs, but we had more than enough time to catch him before he ran across the sea.

Aria was driving--as fast as the engine possibly allowed. There has to be a limit to top speed too, right? If we were a motorcycle, we would be doing a wheelie while bursting through the waves, approaching the enemy.

However, no matter what anyone says, that girl Aria, is a girl so simple that it's comforting.

My hair slightly wet from the spray of water, I...

-fixed my eyes upon the target, which had already entered my range.

"--Sorry, that's a dead end."

\*Bang!\*

I fired a 9mm parabellum bullet, hitting the jackal's ankle.

Sprinting on the surface of the water, the enemy fell down as if it had slipped, and covered with spray and foam...

it sank.

And, the scarab that appeared to have escaped a second before it had sunk, ran away from us.

We were hurtling at full speed. Knowing that if she just relied on the brakes, we would smash into the breakwater of the marina on the opposite shore, Aria--SCREEEECCCCHH--...!

-span the jet ski around, raising a pillar of water like that of a fountain, before stopping.

\*Shii\*...\*Shii\*...

The waves that Aria had agitated just now, returned to normal.

\*Click, Click\*

Using such a crude method to stop just now, the engine had died.

...This is really unlucky. The engine dying in a place like this.

I glanced at Tokyo Bay, which was illuminated by the rays of sunset, and returned the Beretta to holster.

I still don't understand why those golems were attacking the casino, attacking us...

But, this counts as solved.

"Aria, let's go back to the golden pyramidion. The chances are slim that an ability user who controls dolls would show up himself...but I'm a little worried about Shirayuki."

However...Aria didn't seem to be listening to me.

Dipping her head for some unknown reason, she was staring straight at the watch mounted on the handlebars.

"...Are you afraid again?"

I gently placed my hand on her creamy, white shoulder--

"Kyaa!"

Suddenly, Aria scurried off the seat, just like a rabbit.

What's wrong with her?

"W-we may have exceeded 3 minutes! W-we may have gone past 6:00!"

Standing up furiously, and although she was wearing high heels, she escaped to the end of the jet ski.

"...?"

"Bu-bu-but not right now!"

Looking at Aria, who was scared of me for some reason--I couldn't help but chuckle.

It looks like she's still worried about the 'wager' I talked about just now.

"Aria, water."

...I pointed at Aria's feet.

Aria looked at her feet, and seeing the water constantly rising, she was so scared that her lips started trembling uncontrollably.

Afterward...

\*Shiiii!\* She started crawling like a crab, slowly making her way behind the seat.

And-\*shi\*

-she grabbed my shoulders, bracing her head against my stomach, and pushed me forwards.

She's probably trying to tell me to drive. So she can occupy a position that I can't see.

"Hey...Aria."

Starting the engine once again, and like before, when we were riding the bicycle, I spoke to her,

"Just now--you said "not right now", right?"

"Um, um, ah, yeah. No. Definitely not."

"Then, what about, 'after'?"

"Huh!?"

Aria gave off a feeling that she was frozen, transmitted through her hand that was lying on my shoulder.

"'After' should be fine, right?"

I lazily smiled, turning my head around--

"I-I-I-I-I-I-I-I wasn't the one who lost! You're the one who lost! It's you who lost!"

"But, it went over 6:00 right?"

"No-no-no-no-no-nobody specified 6:00 in Tokyo! It's not 6:00 in London yet!"

Not knowing what to do, Aria madly searched for a reason to refuse me.

--alright, I lose. Following the agreement, 'I'll give myself to you.'"

Kuh! Aria emitted out a strangled noise from her throat.

Haha, making her this embarrassed really makes me pity her.

I guess now's the time to change my principles--I won't chase this one down, even if she lost to me.

"But now that I think about it...who on Earth was controlling those jackals? I don't have the slightest clue."

I changed the subject, driving the jet ski in a straight line.

Aria, thinking that this was a chance to smooth over the wager from just now, eagerly answered my question, saying,

"Pro...probably a nationalist ability user from Egypt. Since a long, long time ago, Egyptian nationalists have, because the mummies of their pharaohs were taken to museums, and because their obelisks were taken by Rome or Paris, been extremely angry. You should learn more about these kinds of things."

She couldn't stop explaining about international crime, a topic she was very familiar with.

"This is also a pyramid-shaped casino...from their perspective, it could be seen as blasphemy. It's not that I don't understand where they're coming from, but violence is never the answer. Yeah."

...Are you really qualified to tell this to others?

I chuckled, but in my mind...

"Summer--is the season where a lot of couples form, you know?"

-Just as I was wondering why Shiranui's words would appear now--

--Bang...--

From the distance, came a sound like thunder.

It's a lot like...

A gunshot, right...?

However, blended in with the crashing of the waves, I found it hard to tell the difference.

"Kinji--be careful of the second shot--..."

Behind me--

Said Aria, in an inexplicably serious voice.

"The second shot?"

"Uu..."

"What's wrong?"

Still driving the jet ski, I turned my head around,

--I think...I got...hit..."

Aria's hands, grasping my shoulders, loosened their grip--

At the same time that I turned around, Aria, her tails shining in the sunset, was leaning dangerously.

Her back, showing through that bold V-shaped opening on the bunny girl suit--

On that place, which was already scarred--

At that moment, the area that had been hit--as if a rose of blood was blooming--spurted out blood.

"Aria!?"

Losing all power in her body, Aria, slow-motion in my eyes, toppled from her seat...\*Splash!\*

"Aria!"

-and plunged into the ocean!

She was sniped by someone!

This is the obstacle-free sea. Visibility is extremely good.

It's a space where anyone, as long as they're a sniper, can hit us from anywhere.

And we were, by the jackals that came to attack us but got defeated, lured here.

Too stupid. Too stupid. We were way too careless!

Me--especially me.

I had finally entered Hysteria Mode--and my weakness of always wanting to help women, lowering my focus in the process, was completely exploited.

However, this isn't the time to regret! Right now, the most important thing is-

-Aria!

I have to go save Aria, who hasn't floated up yet!

I gritted my teeth and spun the jet ski around in a U shape--

"!"

I was shocked by the scene that lay behind me.

Just now, by those docks, at some point in time...a strange boat had appeared.

--And it was obviously not a modern boat.

Decorated with silver and gold, the boat was extremely slender, the stern and bow were like pillars, forming an L-shape, pointing at the sky.

On every 5-meter section of the oars, in a neat row, there were six jackals.

On the deck there was a cube-shaped cabin. The jewels encrusted into it shown under the light of the sunset.

And on the roof of that cabin--

-standing there was a nearly-naked, short-haired, beautiful woman, clad in very risque clothing.

The bridge of her nose was very high up. Her slender eyes radiated a terrifying pride. She had huge gold hoop-earrings. On her forehead was a cobra-like gold circlet. Her bra was shockingly slender, and ornate golden jewelry was draped over her chest. On her waist, there was a piece of silk that looked much like a fine golden band.

Wearing high-heeled slippers, stepping forward, the girl--

The fingers, with long red nails, grasped a WA2000 sniper rifle, painted for desert camouflage, which was aimed at my head.

--I'm finished.

A pistol versus a sniper rifle is like a sword versus a gun.

The mobile pistol has a huge advantage in close quarters, but when there's distance, it's impossible to hurt the user of the sniper rifle. At this distance, it's impossible for a pistol to hit. Even if the one who's aiming it is the me in Hysteria Mode. It's just one of the limitations of a pistol.

--I am completely powerless.

I'm afraid that I don't even have enough time to dive into the water to escape.

Aah. I--

in this kind of place.

in this kind of manner.

--am going to lose my life.

Assaulted by an unknown offender, my partner had been sniped, leaving me helpless, not able to do anything--

--Pa!

Suddenly, a supersonic bullet struck the girl in the forehead.

Late by one moment, from an amazingly far distance--Bang...! a gunshot reached my ears.

Turning around, in the golden pyramid's opened glass doors--in a prone position, her legs widened in order to improve accuracy and stability, the muzzle of Reki's rifle was pointed this way.

Reki.

The genius of Snipe, noticing the gunshot, immediately moved to the wall, noticed an enemy a few hundred meters away, went prone, took into account the wind speed, adjusted her scope, aimed--and counterattacked.

All this had taken her but 7 seconds.

All these steps had probably been clearly delineated in her mind before even 1 second had passed.

Those rapid reactions, I could find no words other than 'amazing' to describe it.

But that attack was an evident breach of Butei Law.

--Butei Law article 9.

Even if a Butei's companions are killed, even if he himself is going to die, he still cannot kill. This is the responsibility and obligation of all marksmen.

Just now, she said she only had 4 bullets remaining. The me in Hysteria Mode immediately started going through the gunshots in my memory...I immediately understood that that was her last one.

So I understood that she must have had the subjugation of the enemy in mind, but--

My face breaking into a cold sweat, I looked at the woman who had been struck...\*Zz, Zzzz\* ...

That woman, as if trying to bury her own sniper rifle, turned into sand.

So that was also a golem!

The gold, silver, and jewel-encrusted decorations fell from her body, clattering as they hit the deck.

This scene, right out of a nightmare...made me question my own sanity for a moment.

But...

I hadn't woken up from this nightmare yet.

For me, the more, no, the most abhorrent nightmare to me, appeared from within the cabin.

Walking through the waterfall of jewels in the sunlight was...

...Nii...san...!?

"\_\_!"

Completely stunned, I couldn't even yell out his name.

My, Nii-san...! Tohyama Kinichi the Butei, was standing right there, on the deck of that boat!

Appearing to have just woken up, Nii-san wasn't Kana this time, he was dressed up as a man.

That probably isn't a golem.

I knew for sure that it wasn't. It wasn't because of the simple reason of being his brother. Rather, it was killing intent.

Able to make offenders cower with just a glance, that colossal killing intent...I couldn't be wrong, it was Nii-san.

Having just woken up, Nii-san, because of confusion in his autonomic nervous system, couldn't regulate his body temperature. So even in the midst of the summer, he was wearing a pitch-black coat, and from head to toe, down to his gloves, he was dressed in black. The only thing that was differently colored--was the white fur making up his collar, his vest, a small part of it just visible through gaps in his clothing, and his face.

This reaper-like clothing added to...that face.

Although able to transform into a woman of unparalleled beauty, he was a man, but he was still beautiful enough to make any male model or idol cry, upon seeing his looks.

That flawless, handsome face, radiated an irresistible, frightening attraction.

"I--had a dream."

Nii-san...deeply, with a masculine voice, said to me.

"During my long sleep, I had a dream that the 'second chance' would become reality... But..."

Looking down on me, Nii-san--

"Kinji--This is unfortunate. Letting Patra sneak-attack you means that, the 'second chance' no longer exists. In the end, my dream is just a summer dream like any other."

His long hair waving in the sea breeze, Nii-san looked straight at me.

"...Nii-san! I don't understand! What the hell is the 'second chance'? Who's Patra! Why are you...on the boat of the person who attacked Aria!"

I roared--

"This is 'the boat of the sun'. It's a replica of the boats from the far past that would carry the pharaoh's mummy to the pyramids. And using this to welcome Aria...was that your intention?--Patra."

Nii-san spoke to the sea.

And from within it...

\*Gurgle Gurgle\*...

\*Gurgle Gurgle Gurgle\*...

Once again, something completely unbelievable appeared.

That...was the resting place of a dead body, a coffin.

And it's a coffin made out of gold.

It's not rectangular, but human-shaped, I've seen them inside history textbooks. It's a sacred casket used back in ancient Egypt to hold royalty or nobility.

The tilted casket rose from within the sea, and sleeping inside was--

Aria...!

Completely stationary, Aria was lying inside.

On the surface of the sea, what appeared to be this gold coffin's lid appeared as well.

Immediately afterward, each hand holding the coffin and lid...the girl who hit Aria just now, rose from the depths as well.

She hadn't used any tricks, and as if being carried by an escalator, she ascended.

--You cannot just call my name, Tohyama Kinichi."

Exactly like the golem from earlier, clad with innumerable amounts of jewelery, as well as being half-naked, the woman--

\*Bang!\* -slammed the lid onto the coffin containing Aria, all the while holding it above her head.

And carelessly--with one finger she lightly tossed the coffin, which must have weighed tons, onto the boat.

Bang...!

Gathering to catch it, a few of the jackals became pancakes.

The woman didn't even spare them a glance, and she was wearing a flirtatious smile, looking this way.

"1.9 credits, right? The cost of what you seek is pretty high, you know, brat."

--This bastard.

This bastard is the master controlling those jackals.

"<sup>[8]</sup>I do not understand you commoners, but if it is just a matter of leaving it up to my servants--it is extremely simple. Those credits should be related to the monetary reward and location. All I needed to do was use that as bait, hoho, and with that simple move, I lured you in. And you also stupidly brought along Aria, the most precious gift, to the pyramid, where my powers are infinite. Aria is extremely unlucky too. I never thought that that little boat would malfunction there and then. This allowed me to aim directly at her heart. Hoho. Looks like the curses that I prepared weren't a waste."



Nonchalantly standing on the surface of the water, she placed her hand by her mouth, laughing with inordinate amounts of pleasure.

Hoho. Hohohoho.

--The cursed person will suffer great misfortune. Even my obstacle to the throne of I-U, Vlad, because of my curse...he got beaten by this little girl so easily. Hohoho."

The woman laughed with delight, and without using a rope ladder, as if walking on an invisible flight of stairs, she walked onto the ship that Nii-san had called "the ship of the sun".

(I-U...! Is she part of I-U!?)

Everything that happened suddenly fit together in the brain of the me in Hysteria Mode.

The amount of credits I was missing had already been advertised by the noticeboard at Butei High. So she prepared a job that would have exactly that amount of credits.

And not having noticed a thing, I--obediently walked into her trap.

Not only that, I politely brought Aria to I-U, her archenemies.

This woman is a sand user. On the day that I found out I had a credit demerit, the board at Masters was filled with jobs concerning large thefts of sand. That--was definitely her doing as well.

I should have noticed something.

Noticed this, extremely suspicious occurrence...!

"Ho"

Striding up onto the deck, the woman appeared to have thought of something.

"Now that I think about it, I did not kill anybody."

Turning around, she stuck one foot forward, towards me.

"The worthless sacrifice is so cold and distant. You. Might as well--die."

\*whoosh\* The woman's hands stretched out towards me...

"I myself am taking the time to turn you into a mummy and send you into a coffin, you know. Hohoho. It is an honor, it really is. You are happy, right--?"

Laughing "Hoho", her fingers started moving, as if playing an invisible piano.

What's going on...?

My body started exuding sweat. Something like steam, came from my hands...from my face, and from my mouth, rising out. What is that.

--Patra, you're going against the rules."

Nii-san's--voice.

At the same time, the heat that was leaving my body stopped.

"What...getting me 'expelled', with things at this level, you wish to flaunt your rules?"

"If you want to return to I-U, then respect them."

"...You're an eyesore."

The woman squinted, turning around and looking at Nii-san, who had walked over to my side.

With that signal, all the jackals raised their oars, pointing them towards Nii-san at the same time.

The tip of those oars were as sharp as spearpoints.

But Nii-san payed no attention to them, but pointed at the edge of his own blade.

"You can do what you like with Aria, but do not kill people freely."--You haven't forgotten the words that the 'Professor' told me to tell you, right?"

"..."

The girl--Patra, hearing this, pursed her lips, not saying anything.

"Patra, I realize that you wish to stand at the top of I-U. However, that still belongs to the 'Professor' right now. If you wish to succeed as the commander, you have to obey I-U."

"--No! When I want to kill, I kill! If there is no sacrifice, it is all meaningless!" Like a spoiled child, Patra started waving her hands around, \*Clink Clink\*--the gold bracelets on her arm rang out in unison with her movements.

"It's because of this, that you got 'expelled'. Patra, do you still not understand?"

"A-are you trying to shame me!? Right now you could not even touch me with your finger if you wanted to!"

Patra raised her willful eyes, pointing at the Odaiba Golden Pyramidion.

"...Right. Fighting with you next to a pyramid might not be the smartest thing to do."

"That is right! As long as that temple is by my side, my power is infinite! So I want to kill! If you do not let me, I-I will send you to a coffin! Is that all right!?"

Facing the agitated, yet unmoving, Patra...Nii-san suddenly approached her.

Amazing. That's such a natural movement, comparable to the flowing of water, an inescapable, inevitable footstep.

Nii-san raised Patra's chin with the forefinger on his right hand--

"\_\_!"

-and suddenly, he kissed her deeply.

At the start, Patra seemed to be resisting, trying to push Nii-san away...but soon, in the midst of that melting contact, she gave up. And, she slowly closed her eyes...relaxing every muscle in her body.

At some point in time, Nii-san had grasped hold of Patra's limp waist, using his left arm to support her.

--With that, please forgive him. He is my younger brother."

Nii-san used his fingers to gently straighten Patra's mussed hair.

From Nii-san, a different feeling from just now emerged--a stronger, more intense feeling permeated the air.

That's...HSS...! The name that Nii-san called Hysteria Mode! I understood.

At the same time that he placated Patra, Nii-san purposely entered Hysteria Mode.

This was the first time I had seen this. This was the first time I had seen Nii-san enter Hysteria Mode through contact with a woman. Not hurting women while entering HSS--that was one restriction that Nii-san had placed upon himself.

But, Patra...

She was blushing so hard that even I, from such a far distance, could see it clearly. She took a step back from Nii-san.

"To-Tohyama Kinichi--you dare use me? Even though you don't like me at all...!"

--Don't use such hurtful words. I'm not clever enough to have guessed that things would have come to this."

Looking at Nii-san, staring straight at himself--Patra seemed to want cover her own gigantic breasts. And as if trying to calm herself down, she started breathing in and out, deeply--

"No...no matter what, I can't fight with the you in that mode. I may be able to win, but I'll definitely be hurt in the process. This is a crucial period in the process of becoming 'Professor'. I can't allow myself to be injured."

Said she, tossing something to Nii-san--

\*Splash\*

And as if running, she jumped into the ocean.

On the stern of the ship, the jackals, holding up the golden coffin that Aria was in, followed Patra,

!"

Wanting to dive after the coffin, I--

--Halt!"

stopped short, halted by Nii-san's shout.

.....!

The instinct was terrifying. In my heart, I had clearly wanted to save Aria...

But my body, just from hearing Nii-san's voice, froze, as if I had been bound.

--I understand.

If I ignore that voice, one lead bullet will find its way into my head.

The Nii-san as of now will definitely do so. That voice was such that I was able to understand this.

Not long after--\*Zazan\*...\*Zazan\*...

Above the waves, only the boat of the sun and Nii-san, and...I were left.

"--'Hidan no Aria'<sup>[9]</sup> --huh. What a hollow fantasy, a dream."

Nii-san said.

"Hidan no...Aria?"

What?

What's that?

I don't understand...but.

Aria.

I won't let you say that name.

You, the person who hurt her so much--I won't let you say her name!

"Nii-san...you tricked me! You said that you wouldn't kill Aria, right!"

Nii-san, once again, used that expression, full of disgust, to look at me, who was shouting.

"I--am not the one killing her. I'm just spectating."

"That's a technicality! If you had helped, then...Aria...Aria would...!"

"Not yet."

Saying that, Nii-san took out the thing that Patra had given to him earlier, the glass object.

Inside the spherical glass object, a seemingly unstoppable hourglass was fixed there.

"She hasn't died yet. That was just Patra's cursed bullet. She will live for 24 hours after this."

"...!"

"Patra is trying to use this time to undergo negotiations with the leader of I-U. So before that, she will keep Aria alive. However, only until the allotted time. No matter the result of Patra's negotiations, there's no longer a 'second chance'. Since there isn't--Aria must die."

"Nii-san...do you want to see as Aria dies...!? When you were in I-U...what did you let those lawless elite users do!"

Looking at me, who was shouting, Nii-san said--

"Lawless, huh?"

-and closed his eyes.

"Yes...I-U really is lawless. Not only do the world's laws have no meaning to them, but inside, there are no laws as well. After all, the members of I-U are free to do as they like, to reach their limits. The members of I-U only want to become strong, it doesn't matter what kind of methods they use to realize their goal. And--if there are things that will become obstacles, then they will kill them as well, and it won't matter either."

How is that...!

I didn't think that I-U was an organization that--will kill anybody they please, a gathering place for the elite, all who have different aims.

That kind of group...will definitely be liquidated from infighting. It's impossible for it to last.

As if replying to my thoughts--Nii-san continued to say,

"I-U's leader--'Professor', has always been constraining those outlaws. It is because of his absolute existence, that I-U is able to last. However, that time--is about to end."

"End...?"

"The leader is dying. Not from sickness or injury, instead, he has reached the end of his life."

Saying that, Nii-san looked at me again with that colossal killing intent.

As if saying--

-after this, wake up and listen to me.

"Kinji. I-U is not just a group to train elites. They are a group of super-powered people that even a military country would be incapable of stopping, they are a group, made for battle, that even have nuclear weapons. And within that Ignatis<sup>[10]</sup>--has a real aim of conquering the world. If the leader dies, and Ignatis takes hold of the power of I-U...they will definitely use I-U's power, and attack the world without care, wherever it may be, starting chaos and slaughter."

World...domination?

Absurd...!

That kind of thing, is I-U really...planning to do it?

"However, there are people who believe that I-U does not need that kind of future. They are the inheritors of the professor's will, people purely dedicated to the raising of their own strength--they are the faction called Daio<sup>[11]</sup>. Knowing the oncoming of the professor's death, they search for a new leader in order to continue the existence of I-U. Somebody that's able to become like the professor, an invincible existence, so they can restrict the outlaws. Strength, ability, immortality...at the end of a series of failed tests, they concluded that all the arrows were pointing to--Aria."

...Aria...?

"The 'professor' chose Aria to be his successor."

Aria...

was chosen to be...the head of...the organization she's always been chasing, I-U...?

Wh-what...what are you saying, Nii-san.

What's going on.

Why?

"We guided Aria into I-U. However, if she's not qualified--which means, weak, we'll kill her and find another leader. That is the conviction of those in Daio."

"Us-using these kinds of methods to abduct her...How do you expect Aria to listen to you!"

"She will listen. Once she's in front of the 'professor'. Aria will definitely give in to the 'professor'. Definitely."

Facing Nii-san's assertive words, I--was left speechless.

Once again look at me, Nii-san's eyes...were filled with a deep regret.

"Kinji--I'm sorry. I didn't tell you anything. I disappeared from the surface world in order to eradicate I-U, becoming part of them.

"Inside, I looked for a way to destroy them. And, what I found was--'falling out'<sup>[12]</sup>--"

--Falling out.

This Butei watchword, made me swallow.

That...is something that Butei do, when facing a strong group of offenders. They will form a divide between the factions inside the group, letting the enemies fight each other, weakening the group as a whole.

"Dividing the factions in I-U--to do this, the first step is to erase the leader that keeps them in check. So, I looked for a chance to create a leaderless situation. And the chances to do--were two in number. 'The first chance' is killing Aria at the same time the professor dies, creating a void where I-U has to look for a new leader. And 'the second chance' is assassinating the current leader--the professor--"

Nii-san repeated Kana's words, 'the second chance'...

So, it's a chance to annihilate I-U.

And it's a method through killing their leader...!

"Which means, 'the second chance' will ultimately lead to battle with I-U's 'professor'. During my long, long dream, I thought that you might be able to...therefore, I went all-in on this wager, 'the second chance'. However, it looks like I lost."

"....."

"You are still too unskilled. Since you were able to be surprise attacked by somebody like Patra so easily, it means 'the second chance' does not exist. Since there's no 'second chance', I will change my plan to 'the first chance'."

"The first chance".

Which is--killing Aria.

At the same time that the current leader dies, kill Aria, who's been designated as the next leader, creating a leaderless vacuum in I-U...

And at that time, provoke a falling out.

"Nii-san...as a Butei...you still want to kill people...!"

"Kinji. Before being a Butei, I was a man of the Tohyama bloodline. The Tohyama family have always been allies of justice. If it's for the sake of eradicating evil--and this time it's an enormous evil, I won't hesitate to sacrifice some lives. Remember this."

We're done talking--As if saying that, Nii-san turned around.

Patra's power is probably too far, as 'the boat of the sun'...starting from the bow and stern, it started returning to fine sand.

In the midst of the sea breeze, it scattered, looking like mist.

Nii-san's outline, in the middle of the cloud of sand, started getting vaguer and vaguer.

--Nii-san!

Where are you going?

Are you going to I-U?

Are you going there to kill Aria?

Aria...

"Go back, Kinji."

Facing Nii-san, who had his back turned towards me---I grit my teeth.

"I-U isn't an organization you can defeat."

...Probably. That, I understand.

However.

That has nothing to do with what's happening now.

No matter what I-U is, it has nothing to do with me.

That isn't what I'm thinking about right now.

Nii-san is going to vanquish evil.

And because of that, he's ready to kill Aria.

Since that's the case, I have no choice but to make a decision.

--I have no choice but to choose one of the two roads.

Obey Nii-san.

Watching as I-U, that evil entity, is challenged by an 'ally of justice', the Nii-san that I respect more than anybody, not interfering, not intervening. Even if Aria dies, we have to follow the path of all those men in the Tohyama Bloodline--the path of justice.

The other road--protect, Aria.

Regardless of whether saving Aria will allow that evil organization I-U to continue to exist. Regardless of how much Nii-san insists that if I save Aria, she will become the leader of I-U, the path of choosing to still save my partner.

What do I do.

What should you do, Kinji.

This is a crossroad of fate.

Nobody can tell me which path is the correct one.

In front of my eyes, as if reinforcing that in my mind, there were no exits.

There was just the sea, as if laughing at me, the plaything of fate, continually moving.

Still inside the dust storm, Nii-san still not turning his head--to look at me, who still hadn't left, he said again.

"Go back, Kinji. I cannot allow you to die. Only one sacrifice, Aria, is needed."

--Aria!

Those words made me--as if I had received a great shock, floor the accelerator of the jet ski.

Towards the ship of the sun, which was slowly turning to sand, I sped.

The foam of the sea, coupled with the sand, splattered into my face, my body.

--Wait! Nii-san!"

In a state of near blindness--

I flicked open the butterfly knife that Nii-san had left me, and wielded it.

--Clank!

Unable to see anything in the midst of the sand, my engine smashed into the hull of the boat of the sun.

Thrown out of the engine--

"Don't joke with me!"

\*RIIIPPPP\*

I used all the strength in my body to plunge the knife into the hull.

Borrowing the momentum of being thrown out of the jet ski, I clambered, using my dagger...

onto the deck of the boat of the sun, which was collapsing like melting sugar, starting to sink.

In the midst of the sand, only a few meters away, Nii-san turned around.

That gaze--

-was full of fury.

Those eyes were those of demons, of dragons. Radiating a killing intent far beyond human comprehension.

Nii-san is really, really angry with me.

Up till now, the only time Nii-san has ever gotten angry with me is when I put myself in the thick of danger.

--Exactly like now.

But...But,

I cannot lose.

I've already passed through, I've already pierced it.

Pierced through the pathless sea. Broke through the sand storm that obscured the road ahead.

"Nii-san! You yourself should understand!"

I sheathed my knife, angrily staring at Nii-san, unwilling to give in.

"Regardless of your reasons, everything you've done has been wrong--you should understand that! Nii-san is lying to himself--lying to your weak, fragile self! If 'justice' truly exists, if you really are an ally of justice, then you cannot kill! You shouldn't kill people, you should save them! That's what a Butei does!"

--Kinji. If 'justice' truly exists, then what do I do? This is something that I've thought about thousands of times, asked myself thousands of times. The root of 'justice' is the eradication of evil. For the sake of the weak, for the sake of the innocent world, sometimes, there will be sacrifices. No, most of the time, there will be sacrifices. It's time for you to realize that."

"Only that method is possible in order to protect the world...that's just an excuse!"

I did it.

I defied Nii-san--probably, for the sake of saving Aria.

I myself didn't understand why.

But, in spite of all this, I've taken this path. That is an unchanging reality.

To save the kidnapped Aria, I have to defeat Nii-san, and defeat that Patra.

And, in light of that...I am making an enemy of everyone in I-U.

And even the person that all those in I-U fear, the 'professor', I might have to defeat him as well.

It was a long, dangerous path, enough so that thinking about it made me dizzy.

But...

Who cares about that.

Aria has always been walking along such a path.

By yourself, called an Aria by all others, you fought with I-U!

"Kinji. Could it be that--you're disobeying your one and only aniki?"

"You're no longer my Nii-san...!"

"..."

"The thing I've been yearning for--the Nii-san of my past that was incomparably just, has already, during that winter, sunk with the Annabelle and died. The you as of now isn't my compassionate Nii-san. What 'justice'? What 'chance'? I don't care about any of that--I--"

I snapped open the holster strapped to my waist, drawing my Beretta.

As if severing everything between us.

"Nii-san...No, Ex-Butei of the Hall of Butei, Tohyama Kinichi! You, for the charge of premeditating murder--are under arrest!"

My gun pointed at his chest, Nii-san silently closed his eyes.

"Alright. I still have something I need to confirm, your HSS..."

HSS. My, Hysteria Mode.

"Aria changed you into it, right?"

"So what...!?"

--Let me see it."

Said Nii-san, his fingers moving in the midst of the blowing sand.

"The time before this ship sinks completely--is around 15 minutes. In these 15 minutes, I will test you again. I will confirm if your feelings really are genuine. One more time, I will bet on the bond between you, and the 'Scarlet Ammo'--"

Nii-san didn't draw his gun.

Nor did he adopt any stance.

Wr-wrong.

He has. Just now, his fingertip moved towards me.

That unseen shot, that formless stance is--'Invisible Bullet'!

--\*Bang!\*

Nii-san's front, as if it were a light, flashed.

\*Pa!\*

That shot, impossible to see, smashed directly into the middle of my chest, protected by a bulletproof uniform.

The blood in my whole body churning I stopped breathing for a moment, my consciousness going fuzzy as well.

But--

"Why didn't you dodge."

I only half-heard Nii-san's voice, due the huge impact I had just taken.

"I took it...on purpose. You have to understand."

Finally taking a step, I used all my strength to form my mouth into a weak smile.

By my mouth, one line of metallic-tasting blood, streamed downwards.

"...Your 'Invisible Bullet', I saw it--!"

Hearing my words, Nii-san's eyes widened.

Truth be told, I had already expected it to some degree.

And just now, I used my observation skills under Hysteria Mode to confirm.

"Nii-san. Before, we used to watch those John Wayne westerns, right? The basis of that skill, is him--"

Aria...

In Assault, you said that Nii-san's gun was a Colt Peacemaker.

That--indeed is the name of the gun, but more to the point, it's a gun that was designed in the mid-19th century, so old that museums collect it. It's not a gun that modern Butei would use.

But, against all expectation, Nii-san chose that kind of ancient revolver.

Why?

I had been thinking about it in one corner of my brain.

And I finally realized it.

The Colt Peacemaker--in the history of guns, is one of the best for quick drawing.

Stopping power, burst limit, accuracy. The automatic pistols of today have advantages in all areas. But if restricted to quick drawing, looking at the structure, revolvers have the advantage.

That kind of gun, added to Hysteria Mode, which hugely exceeds the limits of regular person's reflexes--

Can be titled with a quick draw that people's eyes are unable to follow.

That, is the secret behind the 'Invisible Bullet'.

"...As expected of my ototo<sup>[13]</sup>"

Said Nii-san, gritting his teeth.

"This skill that nobody has been able to pierce, has been found out by you. That alone, is worthy of praise. Looks like leaving is the right thing to do. Once again, you've improved due to the catalyst that is Aria."

Said Nii-san, his fingertip moving again--taking a stance.

--Here comes another one--!

"However, understanding it doesn't help you. Listen well, Kinji. All your skills in battle were taught by me. In that arsenal of moves, none of them can counter this 'Invisible Bullet'."

Kinji. Do not waver.

You've already rushed to this point. Think properly.

Since you weren't taught any, make one.

You've fought with Aria before. Make something that belongs only to you two. A new technique.

--Now, right here!

"Kinji. You will not be able to dodge this one. Even if it's the you in HSS, you cannot dodge the a bullet that only takes 1/36 of a second to find its target. This is absolute. Even I wouldn't be able to dodge."

My mind in Hysteria Mode--

Rewound through all the battles that I had shared with Aria at high speed.

And from within them, two battles flashed into my mind.

One, was the battle with the segways.

The other, was the recent one, with Vlad--

--!

--Shallow."

A formless posture--

Seeing me adopt a stance the same as his, Nii-san sighed.

"Are you trying to mimic the same ability, Kinji? That is an automatic pistol. It's not suited to using 'Invisible Bullet'."

Hearing that, I was sure.

--I have exceeded Nii-san.

I can win.

This battle, I can win it.

In the wake of the increased decomposition of the sand boat, the sea breeze strengthened.

The sand was even stronger.

--Alright. Luck is in my favor.

Blow harder. Blow more furiously.

The more you do, the more advantage I have...

"Go to sleep Kinji. A younger brother that exceeds an older brother, does not exist--"

'Invisible Bullet'--is coming!

In that instant, in the eyes of the me in Hysteria Mode, everything started going in slow motion.

Nii-san's hand, that movement--

But even like this, I couldn't see his hand itself. However. I can see. I can see it--

The swirl of sand that Nii-san's hand is leaving behind--!

In the exact same movement as Nii-san, I raised my Beretta.

Basically, it was like thinking about your reflection in the mirror--and how to perform a different movement, before being able to hit it.

The selector of the Beretta was on the 3-burst fire that was mistakenly modified by Hiraga Aya from Amdo.

This is a mode where, once you pull the trigger, 2 bullets will exit at almost the same time--!

--\*Bang!\*

--\*Clink!\*

Piercing the silence, the gunshots, numbered 2.

It may have been nearly the same, but I was late by one instant.

Aiming at the center of my chest again, Nii-san's bullet hurtled over--

--\*SCREEEEECH!\*

Using the "Billiard Shot" from the battle with Vlad, changing the path of his bullet, deflecting it backwards--

And like the morning of the opening ceremony, breaking the Uzis on the Segways--

it entered the barrel of the Peacemaker that Nii-san had just fired.

Yes, if there was a name, it would be 'Mirror Shot'.

Making the enemy's bullet re-enter the barrel, it is a technique that is both offensive and defensive.

"!"

--\*Bang!\*

Immediately after, the second bullet was fired, exiting the barrel at high speed--deflecting the first bullet I fired, which was now hurtling backwards at me, away once again. Under this 'Billiard Shot', it flew off to one side.

This is a marksmanship technique that occurs within .1 seconds...

\*Thud!\* Nii-san's bullet, which had re-entered the barrel of the Colt Peacemaker, broke it.

And my bullet, \*Rip!\*, carrying the sound of grazing a sleeve, it was lost in the sandstorm.

Dropping the broken pistol, and while his handsome face was twisted into a frown--

The crumbling 'boat of the sun', sunk into the ocean.

The sand under our feet immediately crumbled and fell into the sea, bringing my brother and I with it.

--Nii-san.

I'm sorry.

In one corner of my heart, I knew that what Nii-san was doing wasn't wrong.

I had accepted in my heart the cruel truth that, in this world, there are things that cannot be solved so simply, but I still fought against you.

But, the same goes for me--

My feelings are not lies either.

I may not know why. But, if it's for her.

If it's for her, even if I have to walk a different path from you, I will be willing.

--Nii-san.

I've been separated from Nii-san...and this time, I've really lost it. I've really lost the goal that I've always had since I was a child.

What should I do from now on?

## Golden Pavilion -Abu Simbel-

---

--Nii-san.

Murmuring, I opened my eyes.

This is...where is this? I...was lying on a bed...this room...I know it. This is the place Muto and I would always play...Logi's student lounge...

--Kin-chan?"

It's Shirayuki's voice.

Sitting up, I saw Shirayuki in Miko garments sitting on a folding chair by the bed, cutting **apple rabbits**.

"...Shirayuki...?"

"Kin-chan, Kin-chan! Seeing you unconscious on the marina, I was about to die from worry! Being able to wake up...I'm so relieved...uu, uwah...!"

In the midst of that sandstorm, I probably fell into the water...

Who...Was it Nii-san who saved me?

Half-crying, Shirayuki was saying, "Kin-chan! We have to replenish your strength! Eat! Eat, eat!" stuffing the apple rabbits into my silent mouth. Uu, guu!

Assaulted by the rabbit army and nearly choking, I--looked through the window, at the bright outdoors, \*Ha\*, and came back to reality.

The clock on the wall was pointing towards 7:00. And, it's day.

Aria was attacked yesterday evening at 6:00. If what Nii-san says is true, then Aria only has 11 hours to live.

I have to hurry...!

But, where do I go?

What should I do?

I don't know, I don't know--then first, I have to find a clue.

Clutching at my chest, which was still hurting from being hit by 'Invisible Bullets', I...noticed that I had already been changed into a new set of clothes and pants with the Logi emblem.

When I asked Shirayuki about what had happened, Shirayuki said that when Aria had been sniped, Reki, who had noticed that through her scope, ran to Butei High to request for backup. So, when the sandstorm over the sea had stopped, the Logi vehicles that had rushed to the scene had saved me, who was unconscious on the marina.

She also said that, at the same time, Lezzad's diving section were looking for Aria in the nearby sea...

But in the end, they didn't find her.

"Aria was...kidnapped. But...Aah, where is she now!"

Losing all patience, I pounded my fist into the wall.

"...The sea."

Stepping forward to hold me back, so said Shirayuki.

--The sea?"

"I divined the location of Aria--"

"43 degrees 19 minutes North, 155 degrees 03 minutes East. The Pacific, in the sea close to [Urup Island](#). The GPS that Riko slipped onto Aria confirms the location. Ki-kun."

Hearing that voice, I turned my head--

-To see Riko, waving a PDA around, standing by the door.

She was wearing a nurse uniform that looked like the one on the [Mentholatum cream box](#), and her right eye...was covered by a heart-shaped eyepatch.

--You've woken up. Tohyama. That's great."

Afterward, wearing a sailor uniform and holding a walking stick, Jeanne walked in.

"I heard those two. Aria's been kidnapped by an I-U ability user called Patra, right?"

I nodded at Shirayuki, who had a very strict tone, looking at Jeanne and Riko questioningly.

Jeanne and Riko looked at each other--

"...Kana, called us up. Follow me<sup>[14]</sup>, Tohyama."

Following Jeanne, who's injury in one leg hadn't healed yet, I slowly walked out, arriving at the floor below in the Logi building, which was full of the pungent odor of gasoline.

"Kana in I-U is the superior of both Riko and me. We both respect him. Therefore, we were willing to do anything to help him, but...Kana only said three things. Aria was kidnapped by Patra. I-U as well as its situation has already been revealed to you. Also, although I found it very hard to believe...he said that you defeated him."

Nii-san...

"Riko and I still haven't openly declared war on I-U. Because of that, we didn't want to tell you carelessly...but, it looks like you understand most of what's happening inside I-U, saying it again would be a waste of time. Therefore, I'll tell you about the curse of the witch who took Aria away--Patra."

"Curse...?"

"This is also the effect of that curse."

Jeanne pointed at Riko, who was pointing at her own eyepatch.

"Riko's right eye is blind. Because she got the curse of one of Patra's scarabs<sup>[15]</sup>, she received an eye infection. Complete recovery will probably take around one week. And my leg, now that I think about it, was also caused by one of her scarabs. But by the time I realized this--it was too late."

"Scarab..."

This familiar phrase could not help but make me frown.

"This scarab is the thing that I drew for Kin-chan before. That's Patra's familiar. The effects are weaker than being cursed directly...but it's still able to transfer Patra's power, bringing bad luck to its affected enemies."

Hearing Shirayuki's explanation, I went "Tch."

On the night of the Tanabata, flying into Aria's yukata behind the shrine, was that bug as well.

Because of the curse of that bug, the engine of Aria's jet ski died while we were still in the middle of the sea...

Giving Patra an impeccable chance to snipe.

(I remember that scarabs...were called the insects of God in ancient Egypt...)

Even though I was no longer in Hysteria Mode, I still went through the sparse amount of world history that I knew.

Now that I think about it, the jackals that attacked us--were very alike to the ones on ancient Egyptian walls. I remember that it's a God called 'Anubis'. Patra must have based her golems off that.

"Jeanne. That girl, Patra is--"

"You should have guessed from her name. Patra is the descendant of Cleopatra. Her head always full of ancient Egypt, she calls herself the 'reincarnation' of Cleopatra, the 7th."

--Cleopatra.

Protecting ancient Egypt with her beauty and wit, the **Ptolemaic** queen, fighting against the Romans.

...After the appearance of the thief Lupin, the knight Jeanne d'Arc, and Count Vlad Dracula, we've finally come to the Royal Cleopatra-sama? I'm not surprised though. I don't think anything can surprise me, anymore.

"Patra--is a rogue element within I-U."

Walking into the elevator, Jeanne pushed on the button for Basement 2, frowning.

Shirayuki, Riko, and I followed her in. Basement 2, from what I remember, that should be Logi's special dock.

"...Rogue element? Isn't she part of I-U?"

"She was. She used to be the No.2, even above Vlad. But because she would always use excessive amounts of random violence, she was expelled."

Having already said that she herself was expelled, Riko continued,

"Patra is delusional. She truly believes that she was born to rule. She was waiting for the 'Professor' to die so she could become the leader, so she could start a war to rule her own country. First, she would take over Egypt, then from there, she would dominate the entire world. She really thinks this way."

"He-hey...! World domination? That's like the kind of villains from old manga--"

"In I-U, they exist. Outside of Patra, there are a few others. That place really gives people the feeling that conquering the world is possible..."

"Tohyama. Riko and I don't wish for Patra to become the leader of I-U."

"But, if the 'Professor' and Aria both die, she really might succeed the throne."

As Jeanne and Riko were talking--

The elevator stopped at Logi's special docks.

In the elevator hall, there was a silver wolf, lying on the floor, resting, and sitting upright on a bench, was Reki.

Seeing us, Reki brought out a mysterious, large iron case.

"Kinji-san. Are you going to save Aria?"

Being asked this question, I--

-turned my head to look at Jeanne, Riko, and Shirayuki.

They all seemed to want to hear my confirmation.

In my heart, I already knew. Everybody believes that I will save Aria. Therefore, they've prepared to bring me somewhere.

I...nodded at Reki.

--My comrade has been taken, how could I stand by?"

And...the reason Aria was taken was my carelessness.

"Then, here."

Inside of the iron case that Reki opened--

-was the Armament Set B that I used during Assault, Beretta-Kinji Model...and the butterfly knife that Nii-san left me, already sharpened to a fine point.

Thank you. With this, I can give my all, and fight as a Butei.

Even if I don't know how many seconds I can last in battle against that Sand-Witch Patra.

"This was also in Kinji-san's shirt pocket."

What Reki gave me--was the small hourglass that Patra had given to Nii-san.

Originally, there was something you could use to change the position of the hourglass, but that was removed, and now the sand just falls down in that round shaped glass...\*Shh\*, more than half the sand had already fallen.

This is probably a timer of how long Aria has left to live.

Nii-san has given this to me.

The one who defeated him, me.

--Go.

Is that what you mean, Nii-san?

"Aren't you going, Reki?"

Putting on the bulletproof vest, the tactical gloves, and the spare magazines onto my body, I asked--

\*Shake Shake\* Reki shook her head.

"Only two people can go. You, and one of them. Jeanne has an injured leg, so she won't do...Riko has one injured eye, so she can't judge distance properly, and won't be able to be fully effective in battle. Take into account that the enemy is an ability user, and Shirayuki fits. She herself wants to go, anyways."

Looks like...while I was unconscious, they've already discussed who would be the best to go save Aria.

However--

"Only two people can go,...what's that supposed to mean?"

But, Reki stood there like a doll, not answering.

"You'll understand in a moment, Tohyama. This way. Once you've prepared, come."

Probably not wanting to see me changing, Jeanne, her back towards me, pausing in front of the next door, looked at her watch and answered.

"Ki-kun. This."

The thing Riko took out--was Aria's bulletproof uniform, and it was a brand-new summer uniform.

You have to save her. And this probably means that she wants me to bring her back to Butei High as well.

As expected of Riko, who's obsessed about clothes.

"Aria is my prey, so--"

Putting that inside the back pocket of the bulletproof vest, Riko...

--If you let her die, I'll cry."

\*Piki\* She used her fingers to form an angle over her head.

This was the first time I had come to the Logi special docks, and it was full of the scent of seawater.

That's to be expected, after all this place was designed so that the sea leads into here, allowing small boats to be deployed immediately.

We continued to go down the long row of boats and jet skis...

"Kinji!"

When we had stopped in front of something with '7th Dock' written on it, Muto, completely covered in oil, raised his head.

However, what's Muto maintaining right now...?

Something like a black and white, horizontal rocket was floating by the boats.

"This is 'Orcus'. The submarine I used to infiltrate Butei High. It was originally able to seat three people, but the modification this time increased the arsenal, so now it can only carry two people."

"Muto, how many knots can it go?"

Hearing this, Muto wrinkled his thick eyebrows, calculating it.

"Well...around 170 knots."

"Amazing. Being able to modify it to such an extent in one night--you're a genius, Muto."

"That I admit to. However, the person who made this is much more of a genius than me. This used to be a supercavitation torpedo, right?"

"Super...what?"

"It's when an amazingly fast torpedo **evaporates water** and creates a bubble of air, spreading itself around the torpedo's body. Because of this, the water drag will--"

Jeanne stopped Muto with a single hand, who was about to launch into an otaku-level discourse to explain my question.

"There's no time for any detailed explanations. Orcus is a super fast torpedo which had its explosives taken out, turning it into a small submarine that allow people to sit inside."

"...But, we have to go 2000 kilometers. No matter how much fuel we put, this will be a one-way trip. We'll have to go over and pick you up, returning by yourself is impossible."

--Looking at me, Muto...

Looking at his expression, I could see that he knew the situation to some degree.

"You heard about it, Muto. Our...that..."

--I didn't hear anything. Curiosity killed the cat. That's what it says in the Butei textbooks, right?"

Muto used the idiom that I said to him during Adseard, when we were punching tickets together, glancing at the Shirayuki in Miko garments.

"You're too much, you're so naive about everything. Did you think that we didn't know? Looking at your expression, it's obvious. These few months, you've been doing something very dangerous."

"I'm not an idiot" was written on Muto's face, and coming from behind him...from within the submarine,

"We've all noticed it a little. After all, we're Butei. However--"

As if giving Muto backup, Shiranui strode out.

--As long as it's the students of this school, it goes without saying that everybody is doing something dangerous. Anyways, Butei Charter article 4--A Butei must learn to become independent. You can not help him if he does not request it. Right? Therefore...we have always been worrying about you from the shadows. And now, when we can finally help, to be honest, I was a little happy."

\*Smile\*

Shiranui, standing beside me with the same gentle smile as always on his face, and Muto, patting me on the back as if encouraging me, I...couldn't find any words to return to them.

Muto. Shiranui. You guys...

Recently, I've been acting really cold to you two, because of that incident with the mail....

But despite that, you didn't ask me anything, and still you reached your hands out to me.

"...Thank you."

That's all I said.

Why is it that, in this truly happy moment, that was all I could say?

I reached out, helping Shirayuki into Orcus, inside...was amazing...

In this cramped space where even wearing a helmet was impossible, fully digitized was a speedometer, a depth meter, coordinate screen, sonar display, and fuel meter, lined up tightly.

I wedged myself into the small co-pilot's seat--and Shirayuki, who had already learned how to control it, was, along with Jeanne, who was sticking her head in with her hair drooping down, performing the final checks on the instruments.

"Then I'm closing the door. Good luck. Also, bring this."

Said Jeanne, separating her walking stick into two pieces...and pulling out the sheath-less saber hidden inside, she reversed the jewel-encrusted hilt, handing it over to Shirayuki. This is the sword Jeanne called Durandal, a blade of legend...

"Eh..."

Shirayuki--looked back and forth between the sword and Jeanne.

This sword that had been broken by Shirayuki was shorter, but being about the same length as a katana now, it was probably easier for Shirayuki to use.

"Jeanne...Is this really OK? We're already using your submarine...this sword is very precious to you, right..."

"Patra is my enemy as well. The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

"...Thank you Jeanne. You're a good person, after all."

Looking at the honors student Shirayuki, who had openly thanked her.

"Ah...u...I-I'm a witch. Really, I'm very scary. Ah...Go-good luck."



Embarrassed and blushing, Jeanne stepped away from the door, as if running away.

Not long afterward, the door began to close, soundlessly.

All the instruments started up, and within 1 second...as if embracing us, they emitted a glow of light and color.

The watch was sent to Japanese time, 07:15 AM...7:15 in the morning.

The final countdown to Aria's death was--10 hours and 45 minutes.

Orcus burst out from dock 7, just like an actual torpedo.

This was my first time riding a submarine, but I immediately understood that Orcus was a unique, amazing submarine. The initial speed of around 90km/h--was rising rapidly, during the stage where the rocket fuel was being burnt. After a few hours, it was rushing through the water at a high-velocity of 300 km/h, which I couldn't believe. And, it's nearly soundless.

Shirayuki adjusted the joystick, which looked like it came right out of an airplane, but the steering was nearly fully automatic. I-U's technology is amazing.

"Kin-chan. I heard Jeanne say that Patra is rated at G25--the world's most powerful witch."

Wearing a head mounted display that looked like a yellow-green monocle, Shirayuki turned her head at me, who was sitting in the back.

"Also, I heard that if she's beside a pyramid-shaped structure, she can use spiritual energy without limit. Patra is definitely using pyramids as a magical focus to support 'Unlimited Spiritual Energy'. 'Unlimited Spiritual Energy' is a type of magic that ancient Japan had performed a large amount of research on, but because of the magnitude of its power, it was designated as a forbidden art."

"...Now that I think about it, Patra said that too. She said, as long as there's a pyramid, she can use unlimited amounts of power."

"Yes. An analogy would be...Jeanne and I are just normal cannons, but Patra is a tank with unlimited ammo. That witch has that level of power."

A tank with unlimited ammo--

"Can we...really save Aria from the hands of that kind of person?"

Shirayuki, as if avoiding me, who was saying such defeatist things, turned to face forward.

"Kin-chan...you're very worried about Aria, right?"

"..."

"Don't worry. I vaguely understand. For Kin-chan, Aria is a girl that carries a very deep and profound meaning...therefore, I also wish to protect her. Besides, I don't wish to have a victory over Aria this way."

"...Victory?"

"Ah, uu, um, and Patra also used her scarabs [16] to invade Hotogi. I'm afraid that the person who took Irokaneayame, is her. So, Patra is the enemy of the Hotogi as well."

Saying this as if covering her earlier words up, Shirayuki's face reddened a little.

After that, while filling ourselves up with the supplies inside the ship, which were drinks, and rations, which were like white-chocolate, we--continued on course towards the Northern Pacific. On the screen of the GPS that is normally used on ships, the estimated time taken between our coordinates and Aria's coordinates was counting down.

I'm afraid that that Sand Witch--Patra is there as well.

After 10 hours--when the final countdown had only one hour left--

Reaching the general area that Aria was supposed to be, we slowed down and used the sonar to scan our surroundings...and noticed that there were several large structures.

How could this uninhabited oceanic area have so many signals? Thinking that this was weird, I deployed the periscope, noticing that a pillar of water, like a fountain, was visible on the screen. After looking at it for a bit, a pack of white whales suddenly violently jumped out of the water, giving me a fright. Looks like those pillars of water were been blown out by the white whales.

We went through the whales...and on the other side of the fine mist that the water pillar had created-

-impossible.

That--

"...An...Annabelle...!"

Looking at the ship, appearing on the surface of the ocean, I was speechless.

Having seen it several times through photos, I could not be wrong.

That--is the luxury cruise ship, Annabelle.

December of last year...it was shipwrecked in Uraga Bay, the cruise that made Nii-san disappear...as if it had been salvaged, it was floating in the middle of the Pacific like a ghost ship.

It had already undergone extensive modifications. The waterline was very low, and on the deck, which looked like an oil tanker--was an appalling sight that made me "Tch". A gigantic pyramid was constructed there.

It's definitely the focus of Patra's 'Unlimited Spiritual Energy'.

Also, destroying that pyramid would need something like bomber aircraft. It's impossible for us. All we have are puny pistols and swords.

With these kinds of weapons, how do we...!

-destroy that gigantic pyramid that towers above us.

"Kin-chan...I know, I know. I felt it inside there. I felt Aria, and Patra--"

The eyes under her fringe widening, Shirayuki stared at the tip of the pyramid, brows raised furiously.

In the whole pyramid, only the top of it was made of glass, and that section was shining with the light of the sun.

We surfaced, approaching it, and we noticed that a section in front of the Annabelle appeared to be a piece of land made of sand.

This can no longer be called a ship.

Approaching cautiously...almost as if floating along, we drove the submarine, which was nearly out of fuel, until we touched it.

Disembarking onto that beach, we noticed that both sides of the sandbar had two ten-meter effigies of Patra.

"This...may have been changed to a certain extent, but it's an imitation of ancient Egypt's Abu Simbel. Amazing...all this was made using magic. Even the whales appeared to have been summoned through magic. They're definitely here to act as shields against attacks from torpedoes and etc."

Shirayuki's words made me frown.

Magic, magic, everything is made from magic?

Patra's unlimited spiritual energy.

It looks like she'll be the most difficult opponent yet.

Shirayuki and I walked through the legs of the statue of Patra, entering a tunnel that appeared to be leading to the pyramid.

Fishing out the hourglass from the pocket on the bulletproof vest, I saw that the sand inside was nearly completely at the bottom.

Glancing at my watch, of Aria's life--only 24 minutes were remaining--!

Inside the tunnel, there was an extremely wide sandstone staircase. I was worried that, like those old movies, a huge boulder would come rolling down, but such a thing didn't occur.

Let alone traps, this tunnel, full of forks, just like a maze, seemed to be afraid that we would get lost, and bright torches lit the way to the correct staircase leading up. Looks like Patra is inviting us up.

In this manner, we slowly approached the top of the pyramid...

Suddenly, a gigantic door appeared before us. Shirayuki, having studied Hieroglyphics back in SSR, read those bird and snake looking glyphs, saying that this appeared to be 'The King's Chamber'.

"Kin-chan. This is the place. Patra is inside, and so is Aria...!"

Saying this, the human radar, Shirayuki--at that time, took off the white ribbon on her hair.

I've seen this before during the battle with Jeanne. That is the sealing cloth that Shirayuki normally wears in order to suppress her massive magical power.

The door, without us touching it, went \*Creeaaaaakk\*...swinging open amidst the deep noise...The interior of 'The King's Chamber' brightened.

Inside--was a hall where everything was made of gold.

The floor, covered with extravagant carpeting, the pillars around the room, the massive sphinx guarding the end, everything, everything, was made of gold.

No wonder this place was shining when we were looking at it from the bottom.

I quickly took in the surroundings--

--It's here. The gold coffin with Aria in it was next to its hands, not paws.

"...You fools from the Orient, do you know why I have let you enter the holy 'King's Chamber'?"

Sitting on a golden throne, encrusted with jewels, Patra--

-held up a huge crystal ball, which had been resting on the armrest of the throne, her fingers spinning on its surface without pause.

Still wearing that bikini which showed off her skin, covered in masses of gold jewelery, Patra was sitting there, her white, slender legs raised.

"I am not letting anybody argue anymore. I am the subject of jealousy of those people in I-U. Even after using my curse to destroy Vlad, they still did not acknowledge my power. They said that Vlad was beaten by three people, Aria and her companions. Forming a group is obviously the nature of the weak. However, if I can eradicate Aria and her companions as well...those idiots will have to shut up."

\*Po\* Patra threw the crystal ball--

\*Crash\*

It smashed into the golden coffin that Aria was in, and shattered.

"I-U's next king will not be Aria. It will be me! The 'Professor' has said that if I'm able to defeat Aria and her companions, holding Aria's life within the palm of my fist, then he'll give me his throne."

Standing up, Patra walked down the golden staircase in front of the throne.  
\*Tap\*

Wearing the high-heeled slippers she was used to, she folded her arms.

"I always act with the future in mind. This time, I have thought about what I will do after I became the queen of I-U. I--"

Those eyes, heavy with eyeshadow, were staring at Shirayuki, as if appraising her.

--hate men. Those things make me feel very uncomfortable. When I become queen, I want all those handmaidens by my side to be beautiful women. Therefore, I didn't kill, but sealed with my curses, those women that are to be used for later. First was the battle-hungry Diamond Dust Witch, and then Lupin's descendant, however, I didn't kill them."

Patra's gaze, just like a cobra's, assessing her from head to toe, made Shirayuki frown.

"A Japanese witch. Your appearance is exceptional as well. And with your strength in battle, I can allow you to be my warrior. Tohyama Kinichi--that man, I can dress him up as a handmaiden all the time, keeping him as Kana. Before, that person did some weird things to me--depriving me of my sleep. Tohyama Kinji, I hate you as well. You have the appearance of Tohyama Kinichi."

You can't blame me for that. We're brothers after all.

Patra's gaze, filled with derision and hate, looked at me, who didn't say anything.

It appears that she took her own twisted feelings for Nii-san, and only turned the portion of hate towards me.

"Therefore, Tohyama Kinji. Now, I will kill you."

As if spurred into action by what Patra, who was pointing over here, said-

"Kin-chan, I--can only delay her for 5 minutes. Take that time to rescue Aria."

Shirayuki shouted, \*Pa!\*

The white sleeves on her two arms fluttered, as if they were the flapping wings of a bird.

"Hihi Hokakumaku [17]!"

From within those sleeves--countless paper cranes flew out.

The paper cranes sped towards Patra, just like thrown stones--

And in the midst of their flight, they blazed into birds of fire.

"--!"

\*DaDaDaDaDaDan!\*

The birds of fire all smashed into Patra, exploding.

The vortex of flame rose, leaving behind a cloud of thick smoke, hiding Patra.

"...!"

\*Baaaaaa\*--The thing that had been enveloped by the inferno was--a large amount of gold sand.

When I had just realized that, the gold on the floors of 'The King's Chamber' all became gold sand.

Next to me, who was trying hard to keep my balance--\*KCCCCCHHHH\*

Drawing the legendary holy sword, Durandal from her back, Shirayuki kicked off the gold sand.

Rushing into the thick smoke, \*Clank!\*

Emitting the sound of a sword blade smashing into something, it bounced off the right.

Defending, Shirayuki temporarily retreated into the shadow of the pillar.

This high-speed melee gave me no chance to interrupt.

There's no time. I have to get to Aria--!

I was extremely panicked, but I could only wait for the sand to settle, waiting for Patra's next move.

If I get sucked into that battle, this pistol I hold in my hand will be completely useless.

In the sparkling, dancing golden dust, Patra's voice rang out from another direction.

"Good. A battle maiden is good. However, you have to show me more. There is no place for weak girls who only know how to run in my handmaidens. If you hide any more, I'll kill you, you know?"

Laughing excitedly, she looked at the golden pillar that Shirayuki was hiding behind.

Inside that hand with red fingernails, was the shining legendary sword, Irokaneayame.

That's the Irokaneayame that was stolen from the Hotogi shrine.

As expected, she was the one who stole it.

"If you don't come, I'll cut you down along with the pillar. Hoho."

Saying that, Patra raised the blade in her hand high up in the air--

\*Pa!\*

Her hakama dancing, Shirayuki, charging out of the shadow of the pillar, brandished Durandal, assuming a low stance.

\*Clank!\* She put her whole body behind the blow, smashing Patra's sword out of the way--\*Zan\*--!

Performing a half-turn, completely surprising the enemy, she brought the sword down--slicing off Patra's right hand.

She...She did it.

Patra's arm, still holding Irokaneayame, fell to the floor.

"Patra. You said something nobody can say. Which is, killing Kin-chan."

Staring with fury at Patra, who was kneeling and clutching her wounded arm...Shirayuki's eyes, beneath her highly raised eyebrows, closed.

--!

There, at Shirayuki's feet.

The gold sand that was thrown up by the falling of Irokaneayame,  
\*ZuZuZuZuZuZ\*...started rising.

"Shirayuki!"

At the same time as my cry, the Patra who's arm was cut off turned into gold sand and scattered.

--That Patra is fake!

\*Ba!\* From within the gold sand, another--the real Patra, picked up Irokaneayame, charging.

Patra, from within the smoke of the explosions from the paper crane, hid above. And on the ground, she left a copy made of gold sand.

--being surprised like this, how stupid. Weak warriors, I do not need them."

Patra, from Shirayuki's feet, closed in, Irokaneayame--

\*Zch!\* The chest of Shirayuki's garments--it pierced through the middle of it.

Shi-Shira...!

...!

All words left my mind.

Shirayuki--

Holding Irokaneayame, which was stuck through her chest, as if trying to swat Patra away, Shirayuki took Irokaneayame back.

Afterward, one step, two steps, she retreated to the pillar she was hiding behind just now.

"Uu...UUUU!"

\*Zu...Zch\*

Releasing a sound full of agony, she drew Irokaneayame out of her chest--

--\*Hyuu Hyuu\*

-and along with Durandal, she threw it backwards.

"--?"

My face twisted into a frown, in front of my eyes--Shirayuki disappeared, just like an illusion.

Immediately after, \*Hyuu\*, a white piece of Japanese paper, cut into the shape of a person, was left there, floating.

\*Hyuu Hyuu\* The paper, fallen on the ground, had a hole in the middle of it, looking like it had been stabbed by a knife.

A fake...! This too!?

The two weapons, flying through the air in a perfect arc--

\*Pa Pa\*

-were caught by the real Shirayuki, appearing out of the shadows.

--Catching someone in a trap then being caught yourself, how stupid. I don't want to be subservient to a weak king either."

Just now, when Shirayuki was hiding behind the pillar, she used a paper person to make her own shikigami...making her own substitute.

And for the sake of not revealing that, she even let it hold the real holy sword, Durandal.

"Weak...? Did you say, I'm weak?"

Having thought that she had won the battle, Patra seems to be relatively easy to provoke--

That voice, already half-mad, was trembling.

The gold sand under her feet, making a \*Shiii Shiii\* sound, danced into the air, forming several daggers.

Those floating daggers were all pointing towards Shirayuki.

"I am the king! Not only the king of I-U and Egypt. But I am an existence who is meant to be the queen of the world! Witch of Japan! Repent for your blasphemy against the king!"

Countless daggers, like bullets, sped towards Shirayuki.

"Hotogi Soutenryuu...Fuujyouhatsushi<sup>[18]</sup>!"

Holding a katana in her right hand, and a sword in her left hand, Shirayuki frowned and ducked her head, charging towards Patra.

Afterward, her whole body spun. \*Clank! Clank Clank Clank! Using her the katana and sword in her right and left hand to deflect the oncoming gold daggers, sending them flying, she continued to speed towards the enemy.

When the two razor-sharp blades, dancing and spinning around, exactly like a hurricane, were about to cut into Patra.

\*Ba!\* Like a blooming peony, the whirling blades burst into flame, wreathed with a crimson inferno.

"Hinokagabi - Souko<sup>[19]</sup>"

Rotating like a mixer, the blazing blades--

\*Clank! Clank Clank!\*

-were blocked by Patra, who had conjured up a shield of gold sand at the last moment, using them to deflect the blows.

At the same time, \*Shaa!\* A shower of gold sand enveloped Shirayuki's blade--making the inferno around it, die in an instant. Like the usage of sand to smother grass fires, sand, is scared of fire.

"--!"

\*Ku!\* Shirayuki gripped the handles, injecting raw spiritual energy, trying to revive the fires--

-but that breathing was obviously more erratic than a moment ago.

While Shirayuki was using the massively overpowering Kidoujutsu, all her energy had been drained, as if running from her.

Those kinds of vicious attacks can't be sustained for a long time, right?

But on the other hand, the expression Patra had on her face was a smile.

Within a pyramid, her spiritual energy has no limit. It's infinite.

If she acts after Shirayuki is out of stamina, we're finished--!

I can't delay any longer.

I have to bring Aria back immediately...!

Having been waiting for this opportunity all along, I stepped forward on the sand.

"--Hihikagutsuchi - Homurafutae! [20]"

\*Saa!\* As if breaking a tile, the multi-layered gold sand roundshield was cut into two pieces,

"Ho, Two layers of Amenhotep's Sky Shield were cut."

While Patra was laughing, making a third shield above her head to block the blow.

I charged.

--Since it's this way, let's bet on this!

Taking advantage of this moment, when Patra was preoccupied with Shirayuki--

Trying to get past Patra's back, I raced towards Aria's golden coffin--

\*Pata\*... \*Patapatai\*...

(...!?)

I could hear the sound of sand particles hitting my Armament Set B.

What is this...?

Once I noticed--wind was twirling around my body, restricting my movement.

"Tohyama Kinji. Right now, I am still enjoying my battle with this girl. Don't make any troublesome moves. Stay in the midst of the wind, and watch quietly."

Patra's words were seemingly directed behind her back at me, who was in the midst of choking on the whirlwind of gold sand.

The gold sand, hitting me at high speed, left countless small cuts on my face and fingers.

\*Zch\* \*Ba!\* A large piece of gold smashed into my face, making blood spurt everywhere.

I...can't move! The wind was about to pick me up...

"Kin-chan! Run!"

Shouting, Shirayuki--

-slid her katana and saber to her waist, \*Pa\*

And drew two large fans from out of her sleeves.

"Hotogi Fusen--Fuujinbaku! [21]"

Shirayuki opened those white fans, which looked like billboards, and with a violent posture, she started waving the white fans around, nearly blowing herself back.

Fuah! The hurricane that Shirayuki created dissipated the whirlwind of gold sand beautifully.

When I had touched down from my former position, legs slightly off the floor, I immediately started to advance.

Aria--

"Kin-chan, run! To Aria--!"

"Commoner! Don't think you can touch the coffin!"

Patra shouted this way--

\*Zuu, zzzzz\*...!

The gigantic sphinx statue whose foot Aria's coffin was next to, started moving.

Th-this thing...can move!?

Because it was sitting out there in the open, it made me careless.

Looks like this--is a gigantic golem that Patra had set up for ambush.

Reciting something from out of an Egyptian scroll, the sphinx, standing up, was more than 10 meters tall. It was almost like a gigantic robot from an anime, a dinosaur from the Cretaceous period, a true monster...

My Beretta and knife won't do anything to this!

"I knew that it was going to move..."

Shirayuki drew her katana and saber again, holding them horizontally at her sides, just like wings.

And as if trying to hide the blades from a frontal point of view, she brought them behind her back.

"So my last attack--was reserved for that Sphinx<sup>[22]</sup>!"

\*Paaan!\*Her eyebrows below her fringe were raised and closing her eyes, accumulating power, Shirayuki--

"Hotogi Soutenryuu, Secret Art--Hihi Hotogigami - Fatae no Nagareboshi--!!<sup>[23]</sup>"

Crossing the swords like a cross, Shirayuki, exerting all the strength in her body, swung the blades outwards in a blazing arc!

\*ZHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!\*

The deep red light that was emitted out of the blades flew by my head--  
-becoming an X-shaped blade, colliding with the head of the Sphinx.

\*DGAAAAAAAAAAHHH!\*

I rushed into the vortex of flame, and countless fragments of the Sphinx's head were turning back into sand and falling onto my head--

In just one step. In just one leap, I can, reach Aria's coffin!

My watch--the time left on it was just 5 minutes--!

"Halt! Tohyama Kinji!"

That hysterical voice made me turn around--

...!

Right now, Patra was standing on Shirayuki, who had fallen down on the ground...!

"Uu...!"

Crouching in the desert of gold, moaning with pain, it looked like Shirayuki...

-Because of that blow which destroyed the sphinx, she had used up all her spiritual energy.

"...Shirayuki!"

My gun pointed at Patra--

But, from the body of the fallen Shirayuki, \*whooosh\*...smoke, reminiscent of steam, started rising.

"Throw that away and leave the coffin, Tohyama. Otherwise, this girl will become a mummy."

"...What...?"

"The human body is something that is just like a bag of water. I hold the holy secret technique of sucking out all that water."

Hoho. Below the foot of Patra, who was cruelly smiling, the rate of steam rising from Shirayuki was getting more and more quick.

"Ah....Aahh...."

Shirayuki's voice, full of agony--

"Wa-wait, Patra!"

-made me place my gun by my feet.

I couldn't help but put it down.

"Hoho. This two person team of yours is pretty good. Not only did you manage to break the sphinx, but you also reached the coffin. But in the end, these are just the techniques of mere people. There's no way to fight against the fact that I am the one who holds the power of the Gods. The power that I hold, along with the pyramid<sup>[24]</sup>, is infinite! Those without limits will win over those with limits. This is the truth. Commoners like you trying

to overturn the truth--impossible. Impossible, impossible, impossible, impossible, it is impossible."

When Patra was boasting, and the bracelets on the hands on her arms started ringing--

my body also, with a \*whoooosh...\*, started to release smoke.

This isn't sweat. As if pulling the life force out of me, all the water was being sucked out.

Uu...Uuu...!

I opened my mouth in agony, and as if I had been smoking a cigarette, smoke started pouring out of it.

My throat was dry, the surface of my tongue became rough, even my eyes were releasing smoke...I can't see in front of me...

--\*Clang!\*

This sound came from outside of the pyramid.

\*Clang Clang Clang Clang Zch\*---

From my hazy vision, I couldn't see anything different.

However, there was the sound of something climbing the pyramid...close to me...?

"--!?"

\*CCCHHHNNNGGG!\* The glass behind me broke. Turning my head, I could only see a red Orcus crashing in--

It was probably because Patra's concentration had been interrupted by this shock, but the smoke stopped pouring out of Shirayuki's and my bodies.

"Then--"

The Orcus was lying there silently...when the door opened.

"Let me break the impossible."

Was my Beretta bugged? Facing the owner of that voice, who seemed to have listened in on that conversation just now--Patra went \*Gaaaah\* Not

only was she abnormally angry, but her pale face started blushing immediately.

"...Tohyama, Kinichi...! No, Kana!"

Kana!

When I just had had that reaction, daggers, made out of gold sand--\*Kch Kch Kch Kch\*

-thudded deeply into the hull of Orcus.

But, I saw it.

During that moment, jumping out of the door of the submarine, Kana--

\*PaPaPaPaPa!\*

Her long tails flying, Kana performed a magnificent flip, and around her--  
-six points of light, flashed, nearly simultaneously.

A continuous six "Invisible Bullet".

Patra bent desperately, until her waist was about to touch the ground, but--

\*Sha\* On the knees of Patra, who was kneeling on the ground like a cat...two streams of blood ran down.

Patra, for the first time, was injured--!

\*Tap\*

In the hands of Kana, who had dropped to the floor--

-was the same model of gun that I had broken, a Colt Peacemaker.

Kana. Nii-san.

Even without words, I understood. Just now, he had shot at Patra.

Which means that again, Nii-san...

-had decided not to kill Aria. That he had bet on the "second chance" to defeat I-U...

"Exodus 34:13 --But you shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves--"

\*Ba\*

Reciting a verse from the bible and throwing six bullets into the air, Kana--

\*Click!\*

--waved her pistol went from left to right, towards the bullets in the air.

\*Click!\* The revolver, a Colt Peacemaker, went back to normal, the six bullets loaded.

Air reload. That's what Nii-san called this technique that was almost like magic, something that could only be done during Hysteria Mode.

That's right. The Nii-san that has become the woman of unparalleled beauty, Kana, can sustain his Hysteria Mode for long periods of time.

"Kinji. The dagger that I gave you, you still have it, right? The scarlet butterfly knife, that is."

I nodded at Kana, who had turned her head slightly to look at me.

--Hold that dagger, and while doing so, place your lips on Aria's."

What...?

Pl-place my lips on Aria's...?

Why? Why do I need to? Why do I have to do that kind of thing to the near-dead Aria...?

Not even giving me time to question the meaning of his words, once again, Kana assumed that formless stance.

And, she used that gait, just like flowing water, to walk towards Patra.

"Patra. The me as of now--even if you're a girl, I won't hold back."

"...Kana, Kinichi. Don't come closer. I, wo-won't fight you."

Patra, sitting on the floor, blushing, shuffled backwards.

"Patra. You may look as ferocious as a wild beast, but actually, you're a very intelligent girl. Someone who's able to write different words with her

left and right hand at the same time, able to control the movement of several different things at once. However, that concentration has a limit--"

Facing Kana, who was speaking as he was walking--

"Don't act as if I'm an idiot! I-I like you---Ah, Uu, I-I can like somebody like you!"

Gritting her teeth and saying this, Patra conjured up six of those UFO-like shields.

They numbered six. She had obviously made them to block "Invisible Bullet".

The aggressive Patra, actually used the gold sand to make defensive weapons against Kana?

"You can't be only this powerful, Patra. Use all that you can."

Said Kana, \*PaPaPaPaPa!\*

Not in points, but in a line of muzzle flashes, he fired towards Patra.

Patra moved. Frowning with a \*Kuu\*, she just managed to use the six shields to defend herself.

"I-I hate you--!" Swaying without pause, Patra used the gold sand in the surroundings to make a gold eagle. (Not a golden eagle.)

Not only were their beaks sharp, but with wings also like razor blades, seven, no, eight eagles appeared. They sped towards Kana from different directions.

"Hmph. Eight. I thought that you could make more."

Saying that gently, Kana--

\*Spin\* Her tail sprang up, swinging in place.

\*Clank! Clank Clank!\* All the eagles that were attacking had been sliced in half.

And, this was a completely invisible slash.

"It's not over!"

Once again, Patra made gold eagles, and this time, 20 or so appeared at once, but some of them were missing feet, some of their heads were as small as quails, and some of them were crooked... however, their battle potential still remained the same.

"\_\_!"

One eagle, after it had been slashed open by Kana, who had spun again--cut open the ribbon tying that hair.

\*Bara\*--

Her hair hanging loosely, Kana flashed an expression which meant "There's no other way."--

\*Kch KchKchKch!\*

In a moment, she assembled the separated metal pieces that were hidden in her hair.

Apparently, every time those metal pieces with bits of slender wire hanging of them touched, they would stick together. It was probably designed to put it self together using those wires. In the blink of an eye, the pieces of metal had became a huge curved blade--immediately after, Kana took out a metal pole that resembled a three-section-staff from her clothes, putting them together.

The thing that Kana was carrying in the midst of the whirling wind pressure--

"Well done, Patra. Making me use this, you're the first one. It's called, Scorpio--this name really fits the desert, right?"

That was the same thing that the Western Reaper carried, a scythe.

And to keep the blade from being noticed amongst her hair, it was dyed with camouflage dye.

In the face of that gigantic scythe, which would make anybody cower--

"I-I am a--pharaoh! Don't think that...Don't think that commoners like you can defeat me!"

Hesitating for a moment, Patra made many more leopards out of gold sand, pythons out of gold sand--and from the sky, coming from the bottom and top, bees, to attack.

Opposing this, \*Huu HyuuHuuHuu!\*

The arc of the scythe, far faster than the speed of a double jumping rope, appeared around Kana. It didn't differentiate between the attacks from up, down, left, and right, merely a whirlwind of death, creating a spherical border after which nothing went past.

Kana's finger...with just that, he was able to control the handle of the entire Scythe. Using just the smallest flick of her finger, the smallest possible input of energy, she continually increased the speed of the scythe's motion.

\*Bang! Bang Bang! Bang!\*

The tip of the scythe started to create noises akin to that of gunshots.

That is the sound of the scythe blade breaking the sonic barrier.

The water particles in the air continually collided into it, condensing, and with \*PaPa PaPa\*, water droplets started swirling around in a conical manner. With an appearance like that of sakura petals, they continued to float around Nii-san--

\*Pa! PaPa! Pa!\*

Before the golden enemies even contacted the blade, they had already been ripped to pieces by the enormous wind pressure.

--These sakura petals, floating around me...try to scatter them?"

With a gentle expression in his eyes, and a smile aimed at Patra, Kana could not help but keep my mouth dry.

--Strong.

Like this, no matter how many there are, they won't be able to approach Kana.

As expected, the Nii-san that has become Kana is amazing. Invincible.

An ally of justice will show his true powers after his transformation. That's true, after all.

"...Uu..."

Facing Kana, who continued to wave the scythe in a dance of death--

Patra continued to retreat.

Is she forsaking her ability in favor of taking a hostage? She seemed to be searching for Shirayuki to that end...However, Shirayuki, holding one katana and one saber, had already left Patra's side, hiding behind the throne.

And distracted, Patra--\*Kch!\* Nii-san's scythe passed over the floor, flinging the gold sand everywhere, just like bullets.

\*Clank!\* The circlet on her head struck by a piece of the golden sand, Patra could not help but turn her head.

"Uwaah!"

"Don't look away, Patra. Right now, just look at me. Directly, directly--"

Seeing Kana whispering, as if using hypnotism, I--

-tore my gaze away from her, and looked at Aria's coffin.

--If there's a time to take her back, it is now.

Patra is already unable to concentrate on this area, she's been suppressed by Kana.

She's completely ignoring Shirayuki and I!

This time, I can definitely take Aria's coffin.

(--Aria!)

Kicking the gun on the floor into my hand, just like in soccer, I--\*Pa!\* turned my back on Patra, and like scoring a touchdown in American Football--

-I charged towards Aria's coffin.

I did it.

I did it.

I--got the coffin!

Looking at my watch, only 1 minute was left.

In the 1 minute that's left, I have to open this, and save her...!

The gold lid was extremely heavy. However, it didn't appear to be locked. Returning the Beretta to its holster, I pushed it with all my strength, pushing it out of its groove--

I saw her. I saw the face of Aria, lying there as if asleep.

"...Aria! It's me! Aria...!"

I shouted, pushing the lid farther off.

\*Zzzzz\* The sliding lid--\*Shi\* Tilted, leaving a large space open.

Leaning over, I...

"...!?"

Paying attention, I noticed that the coffin was tilting as if it was about to sink into the gold sand--My feet had also been buried by the sand.

...Quicksand...!

Set up in this place was a device. If anyone was to get too close, it would cave in, just like an ants' hell.

This isn't Patra's magic. This is just a trap--!

The sand already up to my thighs, I climbed up onto the coffin.

I tried to pull Aria out of the coffin, but I hadn't opened the lid enough.

"...!"

Fuck.

How could this be. How could I...fall into such a basic trap!

\*Clank\*

The coffin started to tilt even further, above the sinking gold sand. One foot on the tilted lid, all I found myself stepping on was air--and I fell into the coffin.

"Uu!"

This time, once again because of my weight, the other side of the coffin started to sink...\*Shiii\* The quicksand had pushed the lid back onto the coffin.

"...!"

This isn't good. The people who come into take the mummies shouldn't be the ones to become mummies themselves.

I was imagining weird things, but my body was unstable, just as if I was floating.

The coffin was falling, falling towards some place deeper underground--

In the pitch black coffin, trying to protect Aria, I clasped her to me tightly.

Aria.

Aria!

It's me, I've come all the way here. Aria! So--open your eyes!

Aria!

# Last Ammo: Awakening of the Scarlet Ammo

---

With a feeling of being swept away by quicksand, \*Crash!\* After the coffin had smashed into the ground, it stopped.

I was grasping Aria's head tightly, but my own head smashed into the walls of the coffin violently.

Ouch...!

I rubbed my head, noticing that everything around me was pitch black. I wanted to push open the lid, which had fallen back on, but...he-heavy.

It seemed as if gold sand had piled up on the lid, increasing the weight of the lid.

This is also dangerous, but more important, was Aria.

Aria's life would only last for a few more seconds.

My hands, fumbling around in the darkness, found Aria. \*Chuu\* Touching something extremely soft, I was a little panicked--however, I breathed out. Still warm. Still alive. Aria, is still alive.

In the confined coffin, I opened the pocket on the strap of Armament Set B, taking out the tactical flashlight--

"...!"

Aria, against all expectation, was wearing an ancient piece of clothing just like Patra's, covered in gold jewelery.

That, looking like a bikini, was scarcely wrapped around her hip and chest area--and around her, were golden ornaments, and fine flowers.

S-so cute...

Even in a dangerous situation such as this, but I couldn't stop my brain from thinking these kinds of thoughts.

Nearly fully naked, Aria, in those clothes and surrounded by flowers, under the faint illumination of the flashlight...she was so beautiful...She looked like she had come out of a fairy tale, a sleeping beauty...out of Egypt.

However, now isn't the time to be engrossed by this.

I have to break the curse on Aria immediately.

The method to do so...Nii-san said it before.

"....."

Bring my lips to hers, which is...a kiss.

Even without a mirror, I knew how red my face must have been.

To Aria...not only that, while she was unconscious, without her consent...

How do I say this, it's too cruel...No, too vile.

Why is it that I can only save you by doing this.

This may not be one of your catchphrases, but I don't even understand one picogram of this.

"But--"

But, forgive me, Aria.

I understand that my days with you are already full of unnatural circumstances. But looking at it now, those 'normal' things have already disappeared from our world.

Bringing you to a hospital, and letting a doctor cure you--

That kind of thing is impossible. If that kind of thing could wake you up from your deathly sleep, I...

In the hourglass, only a few grains of sand were left, waiting to fall down.

Looking at my watch--the time until Aria will die was...24 seconds.

Aria.

I haven't said this before, have I.

I know that you aren't good with love, so I haven't said what's been in my heart the whole time.

Before doing this kind of thing with you, who is in the deepest of sleeps--I-I have to admit this in my heart.

Aaah, there's only 10 seconds.



I knelt, taking Aria's sleeping face, determinedly...I-I used my eyes, to look over those overly cute, overly pitiful, overly beautiful, lips.

Then, I closed my eyes.

5 seconds.

I--actually understand.

I understand why I would risk my life for you.

I understand why I would defy my brother, coming to save you.

It's compassion, or maybe, it's some sort of respect, for you who lives life so bravely...

...That's right, I let myself think that.

But, those--were lies.

They are all lies that I had told myself.

The way I live is completely different from yours. It may be rare at this kind of age, but even our roles in society are completely different. So one day, we will have to part.

Therefore, I wasn't even willing to say it in my own heart. I was afraid of admitting it to myself.

But, Aria. I-I can't help it anymore, for you--

Ah...

--I really am--too awkward, too childish.

My mouth, far faster than I had imagined--\*Pa\*

-contacted Aria's, small, dainty lips.

I may say that.

But I really only touched one millimeter. Touching an area even smaller than a grain of gold sand.

The sand in the hourglass ran out...in that moment, I--

-Tightly, tightly, ever so tightly, hugged Aria's head to my chest.

Tinted with the scent of Gardenia, the beautiful fragrance of Aria's breath--entered my nose, igniting a blazing fire within my core.

Aah, Aria, Aria...Aria--

--You can't die.

I won't let you die, Aria...

At that moment...something appeared inside the coffin.

"?"

I, who had raised my head, was enveloped by a scarlet light, coming from all around me.

What is this light?

I confirmed that the tactical flashlight in my hand hadn't malfunctioned.

Switching it off, I noticed that the source of the light was...from my waist. From my pants, inside my pocket...

Surprised, I reached into my pocket to take out the source of the light, and I noticed that it was the butterfly knife that Nii-san had given me.

As if opening the wings of a butterfly, I opened the handles--

"Uu...!"

So bright that it hurt my eyes, it was crimson, crimson, a scarlet light that was shining everywhere.

It looked as if it was blazing hot, but in reality, it wasn't.

What...is this...!?

"...Ki...nji..."

Small, soft--Aria's voice.

Aria...

The moment I had closed the knife hurriedly, I saw that Aria's camellia eyes were opening.

"It's your...loss. It hasn't passed...6:00 yet, so it's your loss..."

Consciousness still fuzzy, Aria didn't seem to know that she had been kidnapped by Patra.

As if time had been stopped, she was still talking about our 'wager' from 24 hours ago.

"That's right, I lost. However, I--have already prepared to pay it back. So don't worry."

Saying this, I confirmed the flow of blood in my body.

Hysteria Mode.

Triggered by sexual arousal, my hidden ability.

That...as usual, it had already permeated my whole body. This...I understood, but--

Why does it feel like it's a little different from normal...

"Uh...where is this...? What is this, di-din't I...get hit...huh?"

"That's right. You were sniped, and afterward, various things happened, right now we're in the middle of the Pacific, fighting with Patra from I-U."

"Mo...more than 'various' things happened! Eh, ah, um, what is this!"

Consciousness slowly becoming clearer and seeing that all that was on her body were loincloths, just like belts, and gold jewelery, Aria started heavily.

Haha. Seeing her shy, cute appearance in this tight coffin...it really is happy.

So happy that...I started crying.

\*Rumble\*...

The sound of distant thunder came from outside of the coffin--the whole pyramid, on the surface of the ocean, was shaking.

"Wh-what is it?"

Aria, who for whatever reason, was completely covering the exposed skin at her waist, and I looked around together, but in the depths of the coffin, we couldn't see anything.

\*Rumble\*...!

(Chi...!)

The power of Hysteria Mode, whirling around in my brain, allowed me to, from the second noise, understand.

That's some sort of explosive, exploding below the Annbelle, which is carrying this pyramid.

The ship started to tilt. I'm afraid it was Patra's doing. She probably realized that she can't win against Nii-san, and now she's trying to sink the ship.

Seeing the entire coffin starting to tilt--

I calculated the angle, and I pushed my back against one side of the lid.

"Kinji!"

Still not fully understanding the situation, Aria started helping me.

He! Both her hands and her head pressing against the lid, Aria pushed this way with her back...I saw that the injury from being sniped had been healed. That's probably Patra using magic so that Aria wouldn't die from blood loss.

Our heads basically touching, we finally--opened the lid a tiny bit.

Gold sand started streaming in, falling down to our feet with a \*Shhhhh\* sound.

Open....in this kind of place...how can we die...! I don't care what happens to me, but I won't let Aria--

-Die!

"Uu...uu...uooooooooah!"

"Uaaahhh!"

\*CLAAATTEERR\*

The lid, having been pushed off, fell onto the floor, raising an unimaginable din.

--We did it. We can get out, now.

Even though we had opened the lid, the 90 centimeters of gold sand wedged on top didn't fall down. This is proof that the entire ship had been tilted extremely far.

Looking around, this looked like another large hall.

"Wh-where is this..."

Under Aria's stunned gaze, there were statues of ancient Egyptian Gods. Bodies with the heads of jackals, eagles and cats, looking down on us.

But those gigantic effigies were tilted as well...

--Killing intent--!

"--!"

I spun around, firing my Beretta, which was in full auto, towards the ceiling.

\*Click!\* I pulled the trigger, completely releasing the bolt of the Beretta--However, the golden round shields, just like UFOs, flying through the air deflected all the bullets.

And, behind those shields, slowly returning to sand, Patra--

\*Whoosh\*

-dropped down onto the golden floor from the hole that we had made, smashing through the ceiling.

Patra hit the top of the floor, which had already become slanted, just like a ramp.

"Tohyama Kinji. I...for this one time, am retreating. However, give that back."

Saying that, Patra's finger pointed towards Aria, who was behind me.

"Patra--that won't do. How can you refer to a girl as an object?"

Patra is a girl too. The me in Hysteria Mode spoke to her like a teacher would speak to a student.

"...Ah, HSS. You are Tohyama Kinichi's little brother after all. Naturally, you will go into that as well."

Smiling fearlessly, Patra appeared to have escaped from the top through that hole of quicksand. From the fact that Kana hadn't come after her, it appeared that she had sealed the hole.

"However, you should die in the depths as well. This is the sea. Once this boat sinks, the only person who will live is me. I hold the technique of breathing underwater for long periods of time. My capital was once near the ocean, after all."

\*Chch\*--Patra raised the rifle she was carrying.

Covered with desert camouflage, it was the sniper rifle WA2000 that she had sniped Aria with at Odaiba. It has the appearance of those futuristic guns that appear in Sci-Fi movies, an automatic sniper rifle well renowned for its pinpoint-accuracy.

And the red dot that the laser mounted on it, \*Zuzuzu\*...covered Aria's skin...from her thigh, to her hips, to her belly, climbing up to her left breast with the motions of a snake.

"Uu...!"

Aria...like a frog trapped in a snake's eyes, could not move.

The body that was normally clothed in bulletproof material, was now nearly completely naked.

--I get it.

Patra, you're very clever. As expected of someone acknowledged by my Nii-san.

Even though you can control magic at will, in the end, you choose to use science--guns.

Using the weapon that would most easily create a weak spot.

"The result is, backstabbing you did not work. However this time, I will attack from the front. Sacrifice your heart to me."

Hoho. Patra started sneering. And all the while, I continued staring at her finger.

She, pulled the trigger...!

Use 'Billiard Shot' to deflect it--

No, I can't. I'm out of bullets.

"\_\_!"

When Patra pulled the trigger, I charged.

In front of Aria's body.

"Using your own body, wearing a bulletproof vest, to act as her shield--!"

And, in that moment.

I knew that I had failed.

"Die, Tohyama Kinji."

The laser sight of the WA2000 was...aimed at my head--Knowing about HSS beforehand, Patra had predicted this movement.

She knew that, no matter what, I would act to protect girls.

She was faking the attack against Aria,

Taking care of me first--!

"Kinji!"

--Daa---n---...!

Trying to push Aria, who was screaming at me from behind, back, I fell backwards.

"Kinji! Kinji!"

My head--

--was hit--

I knew this.

I fell down, facing up.

So, it was either the center my forehead, my nose, or my mouth, which got hit.

"Kinji! Kinji! Kinji---!"

On my face...there was the feeling of blood.

Most likely, it was all blood. The same appearance as that in horror films.

Aah, Aria.

I'm sorry.

In the end, I still made you witness this scene...

"Kinji...! No, no....NOOOOOOOOOO!"

Aria's wailing--

I could hear it, faintly.

But...

I could hear it.

Which means.

I...haven't died yet?

Not an instantaneous death, at least.

My vision was extremely fuzzy, but my eyes, slightly open, could still see.

I could see Aria, clutching my head to herself, closing her eyes tightly, and shaking her head with all the strength in her body.

And, when I got hit, I did something... using the heightened Hysteria reflex it seems.

And I blocked the bullet. I don't know how, but at least it was something that prevented my death even if I had been hit in the head, without any protection whatsoever.

What...did I do?

Able to exceed the limits of normal humans by over 30 times, Hysteria Mode, at times, will do things automatically, faster than I can even realize it.

Which also means, it does something that shocks even me--an amazingly fast movement that makes even me think, "When did I do that?"

Just now, that is what happened.

However, that defense was not perfect. I still took damage. I had received a concussion. Now, I...couldn't speak. My body, couldn't move. From another person's perspective, it would look like I had died an instantaneous death.

"---K i n j i---!!!"

Aria's wailing shook the entire hall--

Afterward, silence...fell.

In this silence that chilled one to the bone...I.

-noticed that my body could finally move, and inside my mouth was something abnormally hot...

...\*chuu\*

From my mouth...I spit out a bullet.

I-I get it.

I really am amazing. The me in Hysteria Mode is really amazing.

It seems I stopped Patra's bullet with my teeth.

Also, I have to thank the ceramic fillings that were for my cavities, when I was a kid.

However, even with that, I had no way of fully absorbing the bullet's impact, and a large amount of blood spurt out of my nose...right? That appeared to be how the blood had gotten all over my face.

"..."

I rubbed my face, covered with blood, and sat up...

Patra's slender eyes, under her cobra circlet, widened.

But, it didn't appear to be shock from me sitting up, who she had killed.

\*Click\*...\*Click\*.

Patra's high heeled slippers stepped onto the golden floor, retreating up the slanted floor, step by step.

That pale face. She was completely speechless.

What's wrong with...Patra?

What made you go into this state--

Terror.

On the slope that Patra was slowly retreating onto...\*Click\*

Apparently having gotten through the wall of the pyramid, Kana and Shirayuki broke through the glass on the side--rushing into the slanted room.

"...!"

Turning around, both of them were stunned as well...they weren't looking at me, but something else within the room.

Speechless.

What is it, that kind of...?

I stood up, scanning my surroundings--

(...Aria...?)

Aria, at some point in time, had stood up, facing Patra.

And that Aria, didn't say anything as well.

No--she wasn't even breathing.

No, wrong. She was breathing. But, it was wrong.

I had already been living with her for so long. So, Aria's breathing still lingered in my mind.

What...is this.

That isn't Aria.

...Who is it.

...Who are you!

"....."

Wordless, treading on the floor with golden sandals, Aria...

Didn't even spare one glance for me.

In those eyes, in those irises, there was a scarlet light, like that of a beast.

I too...in that moment, lost my tongue, in that abnormal atmosphere.



Suddenly standing still, Aria stretched her right hand forwards--

--\*Su\*

Her forefinger, pointed towards Patra.

In the face of that, Patra cowered.

And, on her face was shock that she herself, was cowering.

"Wh...what is this...feeling? ...Fear...? I-I am...af-afraid...?"

Patra's hands and knees were trembling.

\*Zuzuzuzuzu\*...!

As if proving Patra's fear, the golden floor rose up, becoming a gigantic shield, sheltering her.

"....."

Aria's, Aria's forefinger, raised like a gun--in front of her fingertip--

Sca--

Scarlet--

Started shining...!

The scarlet light grew, until it was roughly 1 meter in diameter.

And, it was blazing as bright as a miniature sun...

"...Hidan...!"

Backing up, Shirayuki's voice echoed throughout the hall.

It appeared as if there were no other words that she could say.

--Hidan.

The thing that Nii-san mentioned before, 'Hidan no Aria'.

And that part--had been said by Shirayuki.

The scarlet light on the end of Aria's finger continued to expand, becoming more and more glaring.

What is that? That, giving off light like the combustion of the sun, is the 'Hidan'?

But, Aria isn't an ability user. So, why is she able to do this kind of thing--

--\*Bang!\*

"Patra, get away!!"

At the moment that the scarlet light was fired from Aria's fingertip, Kana yelled.

Seemingly having returned to reality, Patra--

Not even caring about any shame anymore, the loincloth on her waist fluttering, she sat down on the floor, sliding down the floor below the floating shields.

The scarlet bullet of light--like a cannon--

Pierced through the shield like it was paper, blasting through the place that Patra was a moment ago.

-----!

And like a supernova, it exploded!

The scarlet light illuminated everybody in the hall.

That scarlet light, drowned everything--in color!

\*BASHUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU\*-----!

A noise, completely different from a gunshot or an explosion, shook my ears.

".....!"

I couldn't help but raise both my arms to shade my eyes as I looked onto that scarlet-painted world--

After I put down my arms...

Everything turned blue.

--The sky.

The attack that Aria had fired just now completely eradicated the top of the pyramid.

Soundless. Athermal. With no shockwave whatsoever.

--It annihilated it...!

\*GaraGaraGara\*...! The destroyed debris from the pyramid--glass and iron frame, rained into the room, hitting the slope and rolling down.

Her lipstick covered lips opened wide, watching the roofless pyramid in a daze, Patra...

-Her gold jewelery crumbled with a \*shiiii\*

It looks like the destruction of the pyramid dissipated the 'Infinite Spiritual Energy' that Patra was so proud of.

"Uu...!"

Always relying on the pyramid<sup>[25]</sup>, for a second, Patra was at a loss of how to use her own magic. Even the circlet on her head had crumbled into gold sand, falling down.

"Ah, Ah, Aahh!"

Just wearing something like a thin swimsuit now, Patra used her arms to cover her body.

The effigies placed all around the room started falling down, one after the other. They hit the floor, and slowly dissolved to sand.

Since it's like this, I can't stand here in a daze any longer.

Seeing the glass and metal fall down all around her, Aria's golden jewelery were also returning to gold sand...within the sand from the dissolving jewelery, as well as the petals from the flowers...\*thump\*.

Expressionless, just like a model, she started falling down, face up--

"Aria!"

--when she was about to fall down, I caught her in my arms.

To the me in Hysteria Mode. Why is it that no matter the time, you have to carry people like a princess?

"Aria...!"

Aria closed her eyes again...fainting.

I got out of the way of the falling fragments of the pyramid, finally meeting up with Shirayuki and Kana, who was using her scythe to deflect the falling debris.

In the slanted room, Kana dodged the coffin that was falling down, twisting like a fan--Looks like, that's the only thing that wasn't made out of gold sand.

--\*Bang!\*

Like playing hockey, she smashed into it with her scythe.

It slid down the slope, catching Patra in the back, who was trying to escape.

Losing the pyramid, the pharaoh Patra, who had turned back into a commoner.

--Uwah!"

-fell into the coffin, her legs pointed up.

"Nn!"

Shirayuki stuck Irokaneayame under the lid, which had flipped onto the floor--and using it like a crowbar, she tossed it into the air.

--Originally, pyramids were tombs, right?"

Saying this while holding onto Aria, \*Clank!\* I used my newly loaded Beretta to shoot at the lid, changing its trajectory slightly--

"Ah, hey! What are you doing! I-I am the phar--"

\*Bang\* It landed directly onto the coffin, which Patra was trying to get out of, her legs and hands flailing about.

It slid into place, perfectly.

--You should keep quiet in a tomb, Patra."

Within the pyramid, which was starting to collapse, the grueling battle had finished--

Above the pile of rubble, beneath the blue sky, carrying Aria, I...

-along with Shirayuki and Kana, we checked whether each of us was OK, next to the coffin that we had sealed Patra in.

From within the coffin that Shirayuki had placed massive amounts of seals on, Patra continued to shout, "Open it, open it. Why aren't you opening it, you insolent fools!" struggling...

--Good night, Patra. You're in the same sort of coffin as your ancestor, after all."

However, under Kana's words...she finally fell silent.

Patra--at least, from what I think--as long as Kana Nii-san says something, you're very obedient.

...I wonder why?

Haha. I have a vague idea, but I won't tell Nii-san. Patra.

After all, the me as of right now, is really gentle towards girls.

## Epilogue: Go For the Next!!

---

".....Kin.....ji....."

Leaving the pyramid, lying on the inclined head of the Annbelle, Aria's voice—

Made me, Kana and Shirayuki turn towards her.

"Aria.....!"

"Ah.....Kin.....Kinji? Why are you still alive?"

Is it a sin that I'm living?

I may have thought that for a moment, but the me who was still in Hysteria mode.....

"Aria!"

Couldn't help but hug that small body.

"Wait-.....uh! Kin, Kinji!? You, you-you-you, what are you doing!? Wait!"

Aria. Aria. That's great!

Since she was wearing the same clothes as Patra from just before, which looks like a swimsuit, I hesitated about whether I should hug her—but now, Shirayuki had already arrived, helping her wear the Butei's bullet-proof vest.

So I can, without hesitation, hug her.

Please let me, hold you tight like this—

Tsa!

.....It hurts!

It-it looks like something stabbed my butt.

I held my butt and twisted my head around, shaa. It felt as if something like the blade of a katana had disappeared from my view's blind spot...

"Aria, it's really great that you're OK!"

Said Shirayuki, \*pa\*, and she tightly embraced Aria as well.

And then Shirayuki shoved me away from Aria, who had no memory of how she defeated Patra just a while ago, making a perplexed countenance,

Ha. Haha.

Kana, who had arranged her braided hair, chuckled slightly, seeing this scene.

.....Well.....

.....Although, there are things that I mind.....

But, Aria, is saved.

Also, Patra is also shut in the coffin,

Though I feel that there was too much trouble, but it would be enough for my grades passing.

This time it could count—as an accomplished mission.

And finally, I can patiently wait for the Buteis coming here. Meanwhile, I can do some sunbathing.

.....As I was looking at the butterfly knife which has already lost its radiance, I sighed.

--Haa.

Kana, suddenly looked towards the sea.

".....!"

Like that, speechlessly, she was contemplating the sea.

As if, she was seeking for something.

That face—became abnormally white.

It was the first time that I saw that. Kana, she would shake that much—

".....Kana?"

I put back my dagger and called her, but Kana ignored me.

As if she was, by the sea,

Nailed there.

"——Kinji.....Quickly run away!"

Kana.....started yelling.

This itself, made me think it's unbelievable.

What's happening to you?

What has just happened to you, Kana.

You, that you would scream at me with that tone, and would be that frenetic.

This kind of thing, when we were living together, it didn't even happen once!

"Quickly run away, Kinji! Quickly retreat from here!"

With Kana, who is furiously shaking my sleeve, I couldn't help but have a cold sweat.

Wait! Please wait! Kana! You want us to retreat, but we don't even have a boat.

Kana, she is at this stage of chaos.

That Kana. Even Patra wasn't a worthy opponent against the invincible Kana. That same Kana is all messed up.

"Kin.....Kin-chan.....!"

After that, the one who understood that expression change was Shirayuki.

"There.....there is something that's coming...s-scary.....!"

Shirayuki let Aria go, and looked as if she was strongly holding herself——

The whole body was trembling, and fell kneeling on the ground.

I looked towards the sunny sky and sea behind Shirayuki—and discovered it.

Abnormal.

The sea——was very abnormal.

The bunch of whales before, there isn't a single one remaining.

No, this isn't the only thing. Even the birds' and the fishes' breaths were not here anymore.

As if——

It's as if the animals in a great savanna felt the king of animals approaching, and then all fled——

"Ah.....Aha.....!"

Kana tried to not let herself scream, and shut her mouth with her hands.

Shaa.....

Shashashasha.....

That quake——looked like an earthquake on the sea.

The entire Annbelle boat was shaking.

No——it's the entire sea——that is shaking.....!

——It's from there, Kinji!"

Aria, who the more dangerous the situation is, the more courage she has, ran to the tip of the boat which was pointed towards the sea.

Me too, I ran to Aria's side.

What Aria was pointing at, was the thing in front of the Annbelle a few hundreds of meters in the sea——it started to bulge.

The sea, has been lifted.

——That——how can it be!

SSSHHHLLLLLAAAAAAA!

As the seawater fell down from the waterfall (T/L: or falls), the thing that became visible under the midsummer's sunshine——wasn't——a whale.

It wasn't even that kind of small existence. It's ten times larger compared to a 30-meter long great white adult *Balaenoptera physalus*, a black metal body, emerged from the sea!

The waves, made the Annbelle look like a fallen leaf waving around.

Aria and I seized the boat head's chain, trying to not fall down.

That large body which had walls glowing dark lights——

In front of the Annbelle, became larger and larger, while approaching towards here.

As if it was a view of a great building from a close distance, that thing which is too great, it simply couldn't let people have the full view of that.

But, I'm sure that that this is a man-made thing.

I understood this——is painted on that great body, at least two-meters big, "I-U", passing in front of my eyes.

These two letters which leisurely passed in front of my eyes, the white "I" "U"——

Made the me in Hysteria mode suddenly understand as if I was hit by an explosion.

I saw the auxiliary history textbooks before.

I. ——That, is Japan's secret code to designate a submarine in the past.

U. ——This, is also Germany's secret code to designate a submarine.

I-U. Its hidden form, is that, submarine!

Its great rotation let the Annbelle look at its shipping space. The submarine looked overall over 300 meters long——I, know.

Though I don't really understand submarines.....but this warship's shape, I've already seen this before.

"The Vostok.....!"

It is the model which Muto was playing with these times, the greatest nuclear submarine in history.

The one that had gone missing after it got dismantled——after the nuclear submarine tragedy, SS Great Eastern.

".....You have seen it, haven't you....."

Said Kana, who was lying down on the Annbelle's deck.

"Right, this——has been named in the past as the SS Great Eastern.....a strategic nuclear submarine carrying nuclear missiles. SS Great Eastern, hasn't sunk though. It has been stolen away by the man who possesses the greatest brain in history, the 'Professor'.

After the rotation had finished, the nuclear submarine stopped——on the bridge, a man appeared——

Kana got up and screamed.

"Professor'.....please stop! Don't fight these kids!"

Ta! Kana, as if to protect us, charged towards the place in front of the boat head.

Pyuuu!!

There was no voice, nor any sound.

Kana was thrown backward as if she had been hit by the man's invisible strike.

As I caught Kana, falling backwards with her long tails fluttering in the air...

——A blast of a gun blared, as if like thunder that came from far away.

On the fingers which I used to support Kana, the feeling of a warm, some unknown liquid was felt.

Impossible.....IMPOSSIBLE.

"Kana!!"

Blood——!

Kana's chest, has been pierced. Even if she was wearing a bulletproof vest.

That man didn't display any movement at all, and shot Kana from that kind of distance.

—— 'Invisible bullet'—— did he use a sniper rifle, and also use Nii-san's skill!?

As I embraced Kana as if to protect her, I lifted up my head in surprise, and then I saw.....the man.....

".....!"

A slender, thin body.

An aquiline nose, a solid chin.

His right hand was holding an old pipe——and in his left hand, there was a cane.

Though he wasn't wearing the hat like in that picture or in Butei textbooks' illustration.....but at this point, I can't doubt anymore that this is a hologram projection or someone that looks similar to him.

He is I-U's leader, 'Professor'.

For some reason, he looks as if he was only around his twenties——

Aria, with an incredulous voice——

Called the man...

".....Great, GREAT-GRANDFATHER!?"

Indeed, he is——Aria's great-grandfather.

Sherlock Holmes the 1st!

Go For The NEXT!!!

## References

1. ↑ The kanji for the 'byou' in Ranbyou's name means leopard.
2. ↑ Kana is referring to Kinji's weakness to women as a deficiency in the immune system. Therefore, what Kinji means by antibiotic is Kana's solution to manual activation of Hysteria Mode. Which is cross dressing.
3. ↑ Namusan is a derivative of **Namusanzou**, the three treasures of Buddhism, except that this particular permutation of it is like saying "Oh my Buddha!" However, for the non-Buddhist audiences, I changed it to the Lord's prayer.
4. ↑ Bug ability user.
5. ↑ Sign of good luck.
6. ↑ Lit. Insect Doll.
7. ↑ 5th Law - Scarlet Inferno Talisman
8. ↑ Warawa, an ancient form of watakushi is used. Watakushi is the most polite and formal way of saying 'I'. Petra always uses this form of I.
9. ↑ Aria the Scarlet Ammo.
10. ↑ Says Ignatis in katakana and military wing in kanji.
11. ↑ Says Daio in katakana and research group in kanji.
12. ↑ Says Falling out in katakana and infighting in kanji.
13. ↑ I'm including this because not many know this honorific. Brother in keizu. The most polite and formal way of saying it.
14. ↑ Follow me written in katakana, come with me written in kanji/hiragana.
15. ↑ Scarab written in katakana, cursed bug written in kanji.
16. ↑ Scarab written in katakana, familiars written in kanji/hiragana.
17. ↑ Lit. Blazing Scarlet Hotogi - Curtain of Cranes.
18. ↑ Lit. Hotogi Heavenly Arts - Wind Section-Barrier.
19. ↑ Lit. Scarlet Divide - Lit. Dual Amber.
20. ↑ Lit. Blazing Scarlet Crusher - Lit. Double Inferno.
21. ↑ Lit. Hotogi Divine Fan - Lit. Wind God's Refutation.
22. ↑ Sphinx in katakana, Western Lion in Kanji.

23. ↑ Lit. Hotogi Heavenly Arts, Secret Art - Blazing Scarlet God of Hotogi - Lit. Twin Meteor.
24. ↑ Pyramid written in katakana, focus written in kanji.
25. ↑ Pyramid written in katakana, magical focus written in kanji.



アリアもついに4巻！  
今回の表紙はレキだと  
思ってたらまさかのカナでした。  
びっくりした！

今回は本編で出番の  
あまりなかつたりこりん  
(ナースバージョン)で。  
何故あそこに挿絵指定が  
ないのか…！という思いを  
ぶつけてみました。  
楽しかったです。うむ。

それでは5巻でまたお会いしましょう！

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